Leszek Gardeła

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BAD DEATH IN THE EARLY MIDDLE AGES

ATYPICAL BURIALS FROM POLAND IN A COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE

Rzeszów 2017

XXXVI

BAD DEATH IN THE EARLY MIDDLE AGES: ATYPICAL BURIALS FROM POLAND IN A COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE

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Leszek Gardeła

Bad Death in the Early Middle Ages: Atypical Burials from Poland in a Comparative Perspective

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This new approach to atypical funerary practices would not have been possible without the support of various people and institutions who have helped me acquire archival documentation from a range of early medieval cemeteries and generously guided me through the exciting material. They include: Magdalena Felis (Muzeum Archeologiczne w Poznaniu), Magdalena Jakołcewicz (Muzeum Regionalne w Cedyni), Dr hab. Andrzej Janowski (Instytut Archeologii i Etnologii PAN, Szczecin), Dr Tomasz Kurasiński (Instytut Archeologii i Etnologii PAN, Łódź), Dr Jerzy Sikora (Instytut Archeologii, Uniwersytet Łódzki), Dr Łukasz Maurycy Stanaszek (Państwowe Muzeum Archeologiczne, Warszawa). I am also grateful to Dr Gunnar Andersson (Statens Historiska Museum in Stockholm) and Professor Andrew Reynolds (University College London) for their continued support.

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I also owe words of sincere gratitude to the members of the Institute of Archaeology at the University of Rzeszów, who have always been very supportive of my work. I am particularly indebted to the Rector of the University of Rzeszów, Professor Dr hab. Sylwester Czopek, and the Head of the Institute of Archaeology, Professor Dr hab. Andrzej Rozwałka. I also feel fortunate and grateful to have had the kind support of the Rzeszów Archaeological Centre Foundation (Fundacja Rzeszowskiego Ośrodka Archeologicznego) and its director Joanna Berdowska. It is the financial support of the Foundation which has made the printing of this book in hardback and full colour possible. Very special thanks are also due to the always friendly and generous librarians of the Institute of Archaeology, Magdalena Rzucek and Beata Żukowicz.

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My parents, Barbara and Roman Gardeła, sparked my interest in the past many years ago through our numerous travels to museums and historic places all around the world. They both have an interest in antiquity and the Middle Ages, and although they are well acquainted with my work and have heard me talking about it on numerous occasions, I hope that they will nevertheless find something new here. It is to them that I wish to dedicate this book, with love.

Leszek Gardeła
Rzeszów 28.04.2017

CHAPTER 1
INTO THE SLAVIC MIND: BAD DEATH AND ATYPICAL BURIALS IN EARLY MEDIEVAL ARCHAEOLOGY

Every once in a while, an article with the word 'vampire' in the title gets released by the Polish media. Although typically associated with horror films or popular books, in Central Europe the word 'vampire' also serves as an umbrella term for people buried in non-normative ways in medieval or early modern cemeteries. Archaeological discoveries of human remains lying face down, covered with stones, and with their heads cut off tend to cause an ambivalent reaction – they shock and fascinate at the same time. The dramatic nature of these finds has the uncanny capacity to draw considerable public attention. In discussions in the media, on the internet and in numerous academic publications, it is often argued that the Slavs were highly superstitious people and that their unusual funerary behaviour expressed the fear that some of the dead would rise from their graves to sow terror among the living.[1]

The idea that a belief in revenants or vampires saturated the minds of Slavic folk, and that people resorted to various prophylactic practices to safeguard their societies against the living dead, can be encountered in a range of textual sources from early modern times. One of the earliest accounts of revenants and their thirst for blood in Poland and Russia dates to 1693 and was recorded in a journal called *Mercure Galant*:

> They make their appearance from noon to midnight, and come back and suck the blood of living men and animals in such abundance that sometimes it flows from them at the nose, and principally at the ears, and sometimes the corpse swims in its own blood oozed out in its coffin. It is said that the vampire has a sort of hunger, which makes him eat the linen, which envelops him. The reviving being, or *oupire*, comes out of his grave, or a demon in the likeness, goes by night to embrace and hug violently his near relations or his friends, and sucks their blood so much as to weaken and attenuate them, and at last cause their death. This persecution does not stop at one single person; it extends to the last person in the family, if the course be not interrupted by cutting off the head or opening the heart of the ghost whose corpse is found in his coffin, yielding, flexible, swollen, and rubicund, although he may have been dead some time.[2]

In a similar vein, the eighteenth-century French Benedictine Dom Augustin Calmet, author of a famous work on vampirism entitled *Dissertations sur les apparitions des anges, des démons et des esprits, et sur les revenants et vampires de Hongrie, de Bohême, de Moravie et de Silésie* (Eng. *Dissertations upon the Apparitions of Angels, Daemons and Ghosts, and Concerning the Vampires of Hungary, Bohemia, Moravia and Silesia*),[3] expressed his concern about a range of disturbing events that occurred around that time in Central Europe (**Fig. 1.1** and **Fig. 1.2**):

> In this present age and for about sixty years past, we have been the hearers and witnesses of a new series of extraordinary incidents and occurrences. Hungary, Moravia, Silesia, Poland, are the principal theatre of these happenings. For here we are told that dead men, men who have been dead for several months, I say, return from the tomb, are heard to speak, walk about, infest hamlets and villages, injure both men and animals, whose blood they

---

[1] See especially Perkowski 1976; 1989; 2006; Wright 2001 [1914], pp. 109–129; Keyworth 2007; Barber 2010, pp. 10–14; Stanaszek 2016a; 2016b.

[2] *Mercure Galant*; Translation after Keyworth 2007, p. 51.

[3] Calmet's work had two eighteenth-century editions with slightly different titles. The first one, *Dissertations sur les apparitions des anges, des démons et des esprits, et sur les revenants et vampires de Hongrie, de Bohême, de Moravie et de Silésie*, was released in 1746 and the second, entitled *Traité sur les apparitions des esprits et sur les vampires ou les revenants de Hongrie, de Moravie, etc.*, came out in 1751 and included a range of corrections by the author. In later years, Calmet's work also had several translations into English and German – e.g. Calmet 1759; 1993.

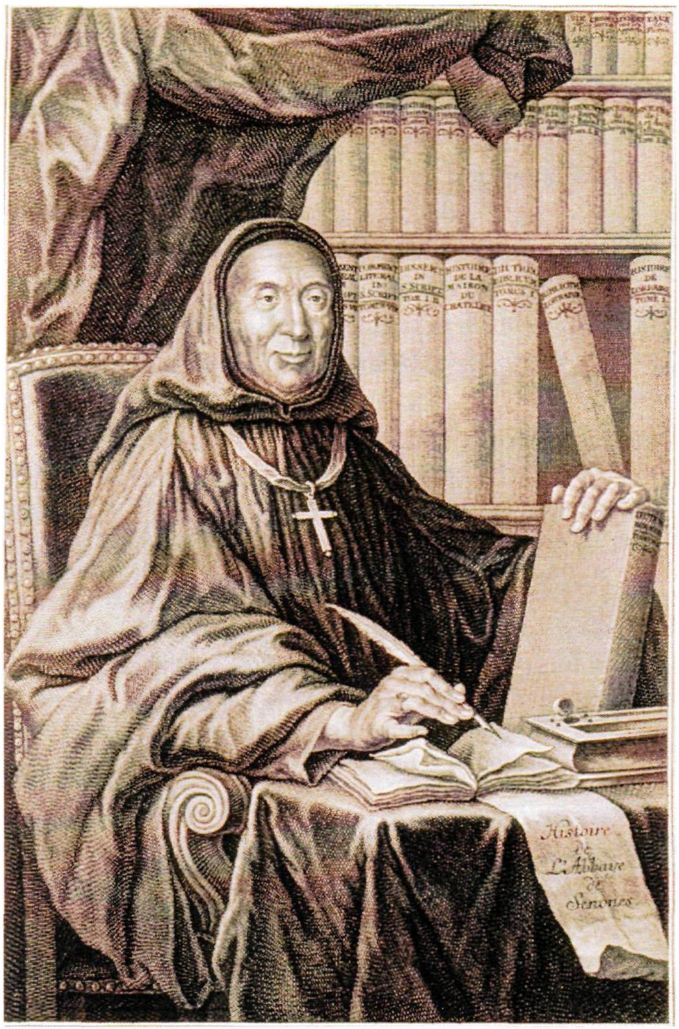
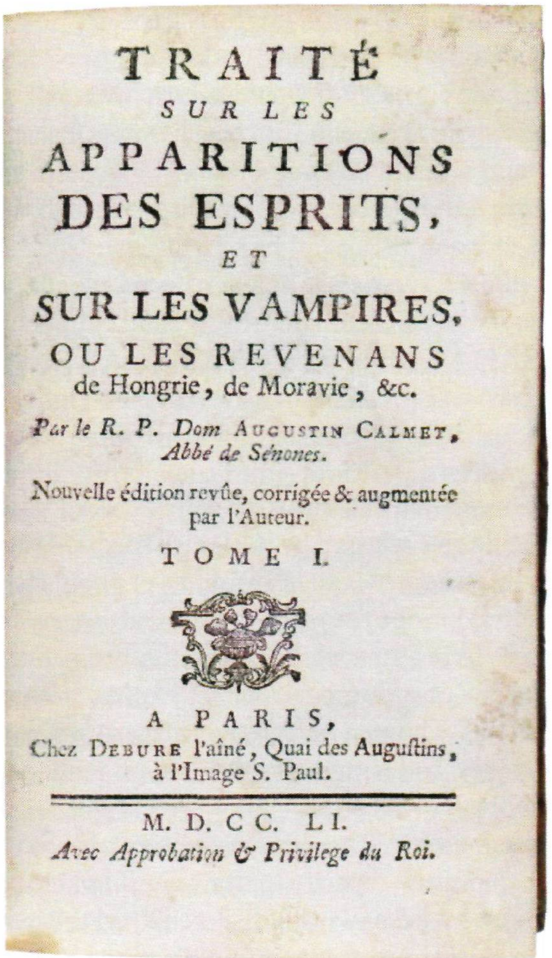

Histoire de L'Abbaye de Senones

Fig. 1.1. Dom Augustin Calmet (1672–1757).



TRAITÉ
SUR LES
APPARITIONS
DES ESPRITS,
ET
SUR LES VAMPIRES,
OU LES REVENANS
de Hongrie, de Moravie, &c.
Par le R. P. Dom Augustin Calmet,
Abbé de Sénones.
Nouvelle édition revûe, corrigée & augmentée
par l'Auteur.
TOME I.

A PARIS,
Chez Debure l'aîné, Quai des Auguſtins,
à l'Image S. Paul.
M. D. CC. LI.
Avec Approbation & Privilege du Roi.

Fig. 1.2. Front page of Dom Augustin Calmet's *Traité sur les apparitions des esprits et sur les vampires ou les revenants de Hongrie, de Moravie, etc.*

> drain thereby making them sick and ill, and at length actually causing death. Nor can men deliver themselves from these terrible visitations, nor secure themselves from these horrid attacks, unless they dig the corpses up from the graves, drive a sharp stake through these bodies, cut off the heads, tear out the hearts; or else they burn the bodies to ashes. The name given to these ghosts is Oupires, or Vampires, that is to say, blood-suckers.[4]

Calmet is rightly regarded as one of the pioneers of vampire research, although based on the tone of his writings, it seems that he was convinced that Slavic revenants were not merely a creation of the vivid imagination of uneducated folk, but that they actually existed.[5] This conviction seems to have been shared by a number of other early modern authors, who touched upon similar phenomena in their works.[6]

All these different descriptions of the living dead rising from their graves to cause terror, spread disease and drink human blood can certainly provide fascinating glimpses into the mindset of pre-industrial societies in Europe. But we must ask ourselves if it justified to project the ideas of early modern authors like Calmet directly and uncritically on archaeological discoveries from periods that predate their writings by more than six hundred years, as it is often done by some academics, writers and the media today. Were so-called atypical burials from medieval Poland really so special and unique? Can the sensational interpretations linking them with the fear of revenants or vampires be maintained in each and every case and without a shadow of doubt?

---

[4] Dom Augustin Calmet, *Traité sur les apparitions des esprits, et sur les vampires, ou les revenants de Hongrie, de Moravie etc.*; Translation after Summers 2005[1929], p. 27.

[5] On Calmet's work and its impact, see Summers 2005[1929], pp. 25–29; Keyworth 2007, pp. 8–9.

[6] See the valuable overviews of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century studies on vampirism in Summers 2005[1929]; Keyworth 2007 and Lecouteux 2010, pp. 1–7. For general studies on the phenomenon of vampirism in different cultural milieus, see Perkowski 1976; 1989; 2006; Dundes 1998; Summers 2001[1961]; 2005[1929]; Wright 2001[1914]; McClelland 2006; Keyworth 2007; Lecouteux 2009; 2010; Barber 2010; Jenkins 2010; Franz, Nösler 2016; Stanaszek 2016a; 2016b.

1. SETTING THE STAGE

Sensationalist and eagerly used terms like 'vampire-' or 'anti-vampire burial' were not born in the vivid imagination of contemporary journalists, but actually derive from the works of professional archaeologists, who, since the 1950s, have frequently used them in their interpretations of non-normative funerary behaviour where people are buried in a prone position, covered with stones or decapitated. The 'oddity' of these practices has led many scholars to believe that they were all employed with the intention of immobilising or annihilating the dead in their graves and preventing them from returning as revenants. These views have prevailed in Polish academic literature for so long that they have now become a dogma and remain largely unchallenged. Therefore, sixty-seven years after the word 'vampire' was first used to interpret an early medieval burial in Poland,[7] it seems that the time is ripe to look at the archaeological evidence with a more critical eye and verify previous assumptions.

With this goal in mind, this book sets out to explore the complex ideas about dying and the dead in Central Europe in the period spanning the tenth to thirteenth centuries AD, otherwise known as the Early Middle Ages. In a strictly geographical sense, this study focuses specifically on what is today the area of Poland, a country situated between the Baltic Sea to the north and two mountain ridges, the Sudetes and Carpathian Mountains, to the south. Poland is bordered by Germany to the west, Lithuania, Russia, Belarus and Ukraine to the east and the Czech Republic and Slovakia to the south. In the course of its complicated history, spanning over one thousand years, the borders of Poland have shifted numerous times, but in a very general sense it may be argued that in the early medieval period they largely coincided with those of today (**Fig. 1.3**).

Most of the inhabitants of early medieval Poland belonged to an ethno-linguistic group known as the Slavs. From the sixth century AD onwards, the Slavs dispersed from their original homelands in the area of the lower Danube and the Black Sea and settled in the vast territories that extended from Ukraine in the east, to Northern Germany in the west, to the Balkans in the south.[8] Many of them travelled farther overseas, reaching Scandinavia, the British Isles, and other distant locations. Because of their broad geographical spread and regional differences in their culture, the Slavs are divided into three subgroups: the Western Slavs (or West Slavs),[9] the Eastern Slavs (or East Slavs),[10] and the Southern Slavs (or South Slavs).[11] Those who settled in Poland, belonged to the Western Slavic subgroup.

In medieval history, the Slavs are remembered as mainly agricultural and pastoral societies, but also as fierce warriors (**Fig. 1.4**), skilled craftspeople and builders of remarkable strongholds,[12] the traces of which still dot the Central and Eastern European landscapes (**Fig. 1.5** and **Fig. 1.6**). The vast repertoire of artefacts revealed in the course of archaeological excavations show that the Slavs were remarkably skilled in producing objects of wood, antler and bone, although their jewellery[13] and leatherwork[14] were also of a very high quality. Furthermore, the abundance of clay in their lands led to advances in the production of pottery.[15] In the course of time, clay vessels of different types

---

[7] In Polish archaeology, the word 'vampire' (Polish *wampir*) was first used in an article published by Jerzy Gąssowski in 1950. His work and its implications for later scholarship will be discussed in further detail in Chapter 3.

[8] For Polish overviews (with German and English summaries) of the Slavic world and its wider context, see Dulinicz 2003; Kaczanowski, Parczewski 2005; Dworaczyk, Kowalska, Moździoch, Rębkowski 2006.

[9] Today, the group of Western Slavs includes the Czechs, Poles, Silesians, Slovaks, Sorbs and Kashubians (or Cassubians).

[10] Today, the group of Eastern Slavs includes the Belarussians, Russians and Ukranians.

[11] Today, the group of Southern Slavs includes the Bosniaks, Bulgarians, Croatians, Macedonians, Montenegrins, Serbs and Slovenes.

[12] On strongholds in different parts of Poland see, for example, Kóčka-Krenz, Kara, Makowiecki 2004; Kurnatowska 2004; Rozwałka, Niedźwiadek, Stasiak 2006; Leciejewicz, Rębkowski 2007; Sosnowska 2008; Gołembnik 2011; Kowalska, Dworaczyk 2011; Stanisławski, Filipowiak 2013; 2014; Chrzan, Czapla, Moździoch 2014; Kurnatowski 2015; Kara, Krysztofiak, Wyrwa 2016; Kurnatowska, Wyrwa 2016.

[13] On Slavic jewellery in Poland see, for example, Kóčka-Krenz 1993 with references.

[14] On Slavic leatherwork in Poland see, for example, Kowalska 2010 with references.

[15] On Slavic pottery in Poland see, for example, Buko 1990 with references.

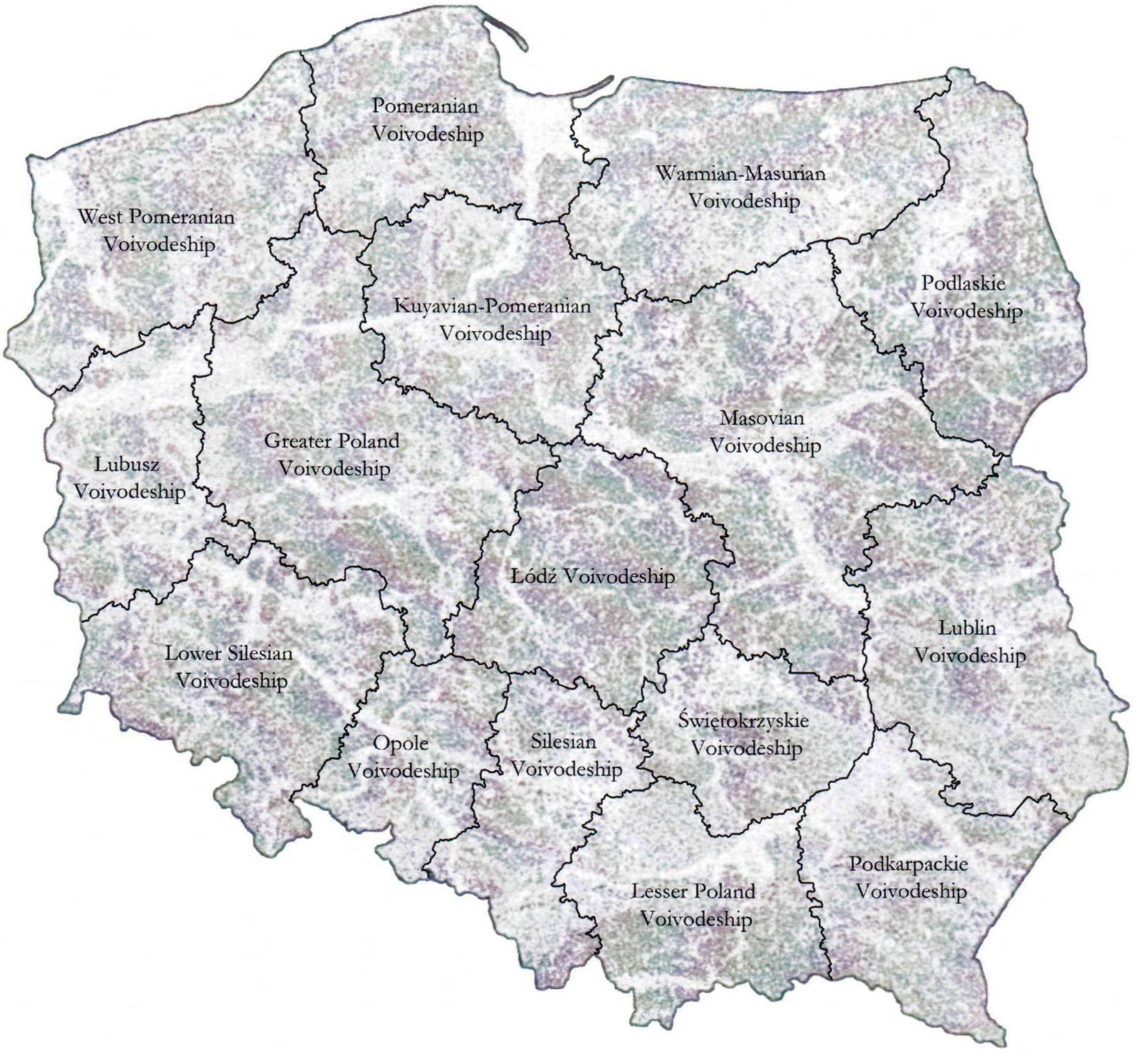

Pomeranian Voivodeship
Warmian-Masurian Voivodeship
West Pomeranian Voivodeship
Podlaskie Voivodeship
Kuyavian-Pomeranian Voivodeship
Masovian Voivodeship
Greater Poland Voivodeship
Lubusz Voivodeship
Łódź Voivodeship
Lublin Voivodeship
Lower Silesian Voivodeship
Świętokrzyskie Voivodeship
Opole Voivodeship
Silesian Voivodeship
Podkarpackie Voivodeship
Lesser Poland Voivodeship

Fig. 1.3. Map of Poland with its different provinces (voivodeships). Map by Klaudia Karpińska.

became objects of intercultural exchange, and some were exported from the Slavic lands to distant areas of Europe, such as Scandinavia,[16] along with other goods such as beeswax or fur.

The early medieval Slavs were also prominent founders of early states – many of the nations they helped to forge over one thousand years ago still exist to this day. One of the key figures in the Central European political arena of the mid-tenth century was Duke Mieszko I of the Piast dynasty.[17] Using his wit, resourcefulness, political alliances and military prowess, he quickly conquered the different tribes that bordered what is today Greater Poland (in Polish *Wielkopolska*), uniting them under his rule. Acknowledging the necessity of baptism if he was to be regarded as a rightful ruler in the eyes of Western European monarchs, and to ensure the succession of power for his progeny, he married a Bohemian princess, Dobrawa, and renounced his pagan beliefs in favour of the Christian religion. This groundbreaking decision had serious consequences, not only for Mieszko himself and his closest circle of his followers, but also for his subjects; in the long run it affected the whole domain under his rule. In the course of the next few centuries, the process of religious conversion – often more violent and bloody than it is usually portrayed in popular history – influenced all spheres of Slavic life, and had a considerable impact on their earlier pre-Christian worldviews and funerary practices.[18]

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[16] Roslund 2007; Naum 2008.

[17] On Mieszko see, for example, Labuda 2002; Zakrzewski 2006[1921]; Urbańczyk 2012 with further references.

[18] For a recent and comprehensive overview of the archaeology of early medieval Poland, see Buko 2008; 2011.

Fig. 1.4. Slavic warriors from the re-enactment group Triglav. Photo by Emilia Kajzer. Used by kind permission.

In order to provide a wider background for our ensuing discussion of various conceptions of death and afterlife among the Slavs, let us take a look at their beliefs before the acceptance of the new religion and during the turbulent period of conversion.

2. IN THE SHADOW OF THE SLAVIC GODS

How were the gods of the pre-Christian Slavs imagined? Were there specific deities responsible for war, fertility, magic or different natural phenomena? How and where exactly were they worshipped? What were they believed to offer in return to the average person? Did the Slavic pantheon resemble that of other Indo-European societies? And what can we say about the supernatural beings that were believed to fill the conceptual landscapes of the pre-Christian Slavic mind? In the case of the Ancient Greeks, Romans or even Viking Age Scandinavians, basic details about their religious beliefs are relatively easy to learn due to the abundance of textual, iconographic and archaeological sources. Regrettably, when it comes to the Slavs and especially the Western Slavs that populated the area of Poland in the Early Middle Ages, this is much more difficult to unravel.[19]

Before the adoption of Christianity in Poland, knowledge about Slavic gods, supernatural beings, the cosmos, and the afterlife was transmitted from generation to generation through oral tradition or 'bodylore'[20] – no vernacular accounts were written down

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[19] For various overviews of Slavic pre-Christian beliefs and their remnants in later folklore see, for example, Brückner 1918; 1924; 1985; Moszyński 1934; 1967; Urbańczyk 1947; 1948; 1962; 1968; 1991; Pełka 1960; 1987; Kowalczyk 1968; Kramarek 1968; Łuka 1973; Tomiccy 1975; Perkowski 1976; 1989; 2006; Łowmiański 1979; Szafrański 1979; 1987; Gierlach 1980; Baranowski 1981; Gieysztor 1982; 2006; Simonides 1984; Uspieński 1985; Łysiak 1993; Słupecki 1993; 1994; Dolińska 1990; Linker 1998; Szyjewski 2003; Kowalik 2004; Strzelczyk 2007; Kajkowski, Kuczkowski 2010; Borchmann, Wiszowaty 2011; Labuda 2011; Zielina 2011.

[20] On the concept of bodylore see, for example, Price 2008a.

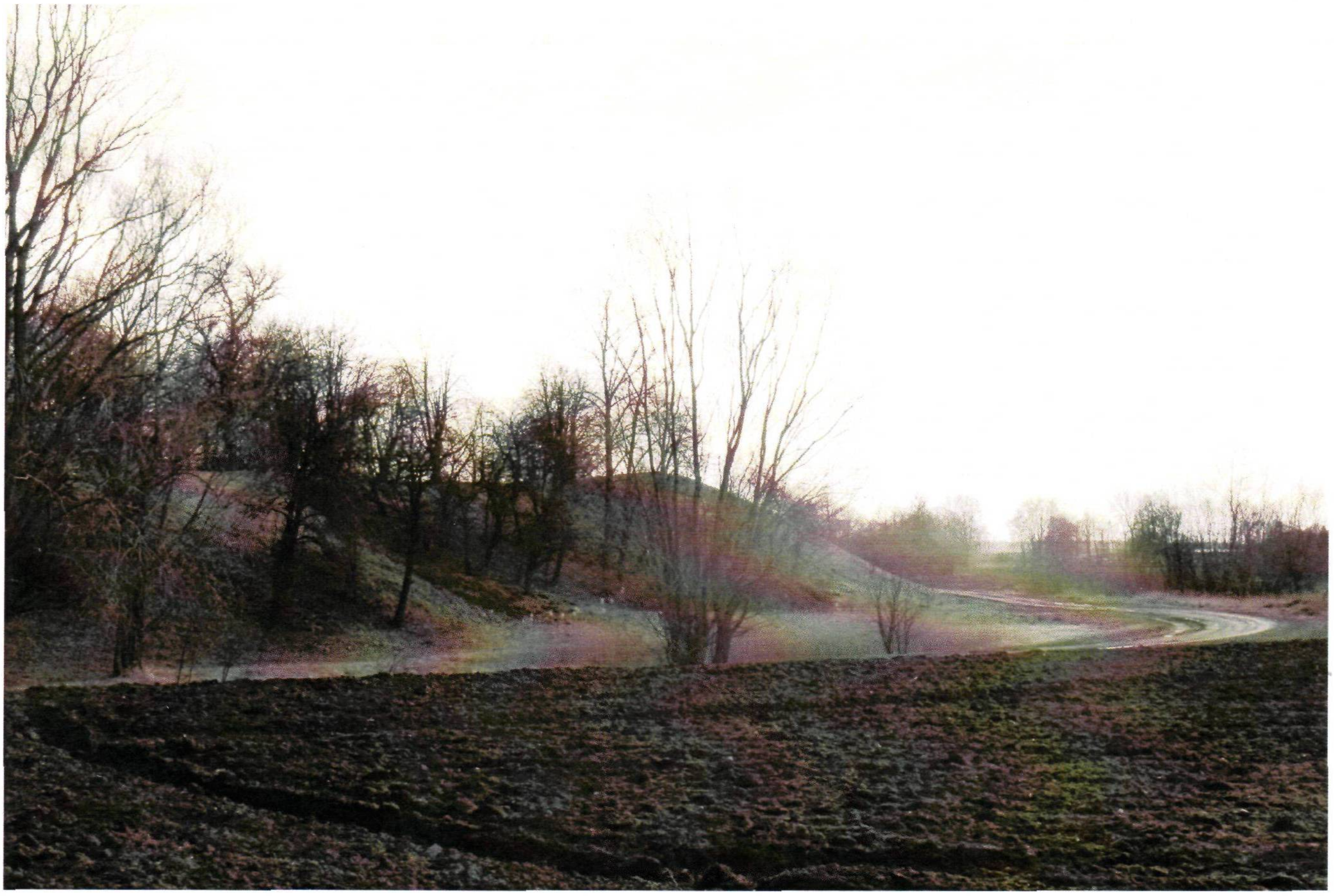

Fig. 1.5. Slavic stronghold at Giecz in Greater Poland. Photo by Leszek Gardeła.

at that time. Most of the Slavs who inhabited Central Europe in the Early Middle Ages were illiterate and, in contrast to their Scandinavian and Anglo-Saxon counterparts, did not record their own deeds in the vernacular language. Therefore, we do not have Polish equivalents of the Germanic runic inscriptions[21] nor any other accounts that would even vaguely resemble the Old Norse *Eddas*, sagas or skaldic poetry.

Some of the best surviving descriptions of Slavic beliefs pertain to the area of Pomerania and Polabia (today's north-western Poland and north-eastern Germany), but it must be noted that practically all of them were put to parchment by foreign observers or commentators with very particular social and ideological backgrounds and often strong political and ideological agendas. For this reason, we must always take into consideration that all the textual accounts of Slavic paganism which we have at hand are not only chronologically removed, but also biased in many ways. These sources cannot be regarded as 'mirrors' that reflect the past in an undistorted way. Moreover, it must be emphasised that the authors of medieval chronicles which preserve information about the beliefs and ritual practices of the Slavs often represented a strictly Christian intellectual milieu, and may have misunderstood or misrepresented what they had heard or seen. It is quite possible that, to meet the demands of those who commissioned their texts, they consciously manipulated their accounts of Slavic paganism in some cases by making them appear more drastic or barbaric than they really were.

Although the authenticity of extant textual descriptions of Slavic pre-Christian beliefs and ritual practices is difficult to ascertain, the situation is not totally hopeless. Various source-critical problems can be overcome through the application of interdisciplinary methods of academic inquiry. By carefully examining

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[21] Some scholars and amateur historians of the nineteenth century desperately tried to find proof for the existence of Slavic runes. There were even a number of forgeries of runic finds. Today, it is clear that the early medieval Slavs did not have any script that would even vaguely resemble the runic writing of the Germanic tribes. For an excellent overview of these controversies, see Boroń 2012.

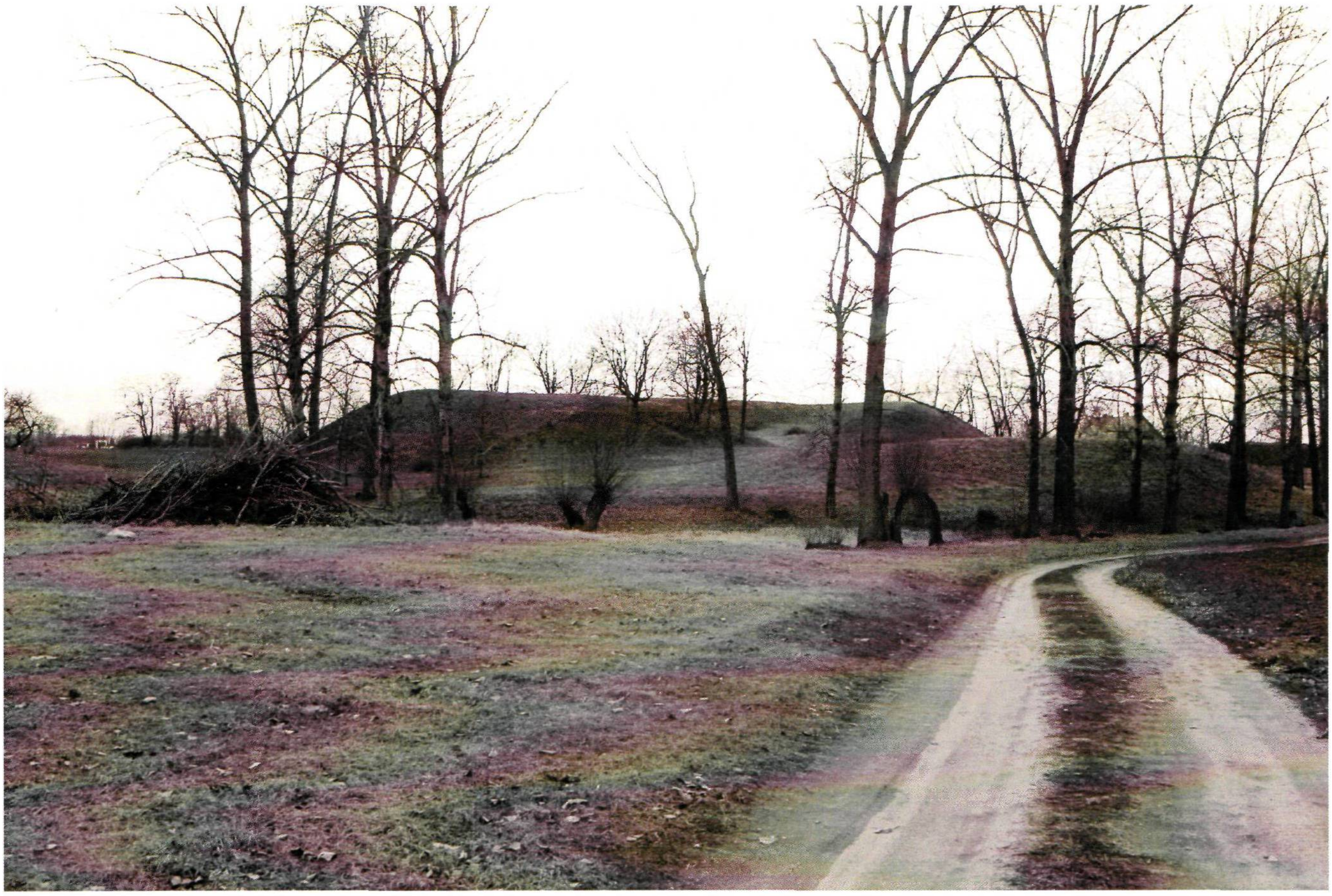

Fig. 1.6. Slavic stronghold at Moraczewo in Greater Poland. Photo by Leszek Gardeła.

and comparing different categories of evidence – e.g. archaeological and iconographic finds, written accounts and later ethnographic sources – it is indeed possible to cast some light on how the pagan Slavs may have understood and conceptualised the material and immaterial worlds that surrounded them.

When all the available sources for Slavic pre-Christian beliefs are taken collectively, it is clear that they had a broad pantheon of gods and other supernatural beings. Chief among them, and probably the most popular, was a god known in the written accounts by the name Sventovit (**Fig. 1.7**).[22] The most detailed information about this deity is provided in *Gesta Danorum*, which was written down by the Danish chronicler Saxo Grammaticus in the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries. In his account, Saxo describes a magnificent temple at Arkona in Rügen with an impressive wooden statue of Sventovit. The statue had four heads and was accompanied by several attributes including a sword, a bow and a drinking horn. According to Saxo, the god Sventovit was also associated with horses, and in his temple was a white stallion which was used for prophetic purposes such as determining if a war campaign should be undertaken.[23] Given these various characteristics, it is possible that Sventovit was actually a nickname among the Western Slavs for a deity known by their eastern neighbours as Perun, a god of the sky, thunder and war.[24]

Another major deity in the Western Slavic pantheon was Triglav (or Weles among the Eastern Slavs), a god associated with the underworld and magic (**Fig. 1.8**).[25] He is often interpreted as an antagonist of Svantevit/Perun and extant textual and folkloristic sources describe an ongoing conflict between them – interestingly, it appears to have been a conflict of cosmic importance and one that played an important role in the genesis

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[22] On Sventovit/Perun see, for example, Słupecki 1994, pp. 25, 28–30, 32, 38–42; Gieysztor 2006, pp. 114–137.

[23] On horses in Slavic ritual practices, see Rajewski 1975; Reiter 1981; Łukaszyk 2012; Kajkowski 2016a.

[24] See discussion in Słupecki 1994, p. 44.

[25] On Triglav/Weles see, for example, Uspieński 1985; Słupecki 1994, p. 9; Gieysztor 2006, pp. 137–155; Trkanjec 2013.

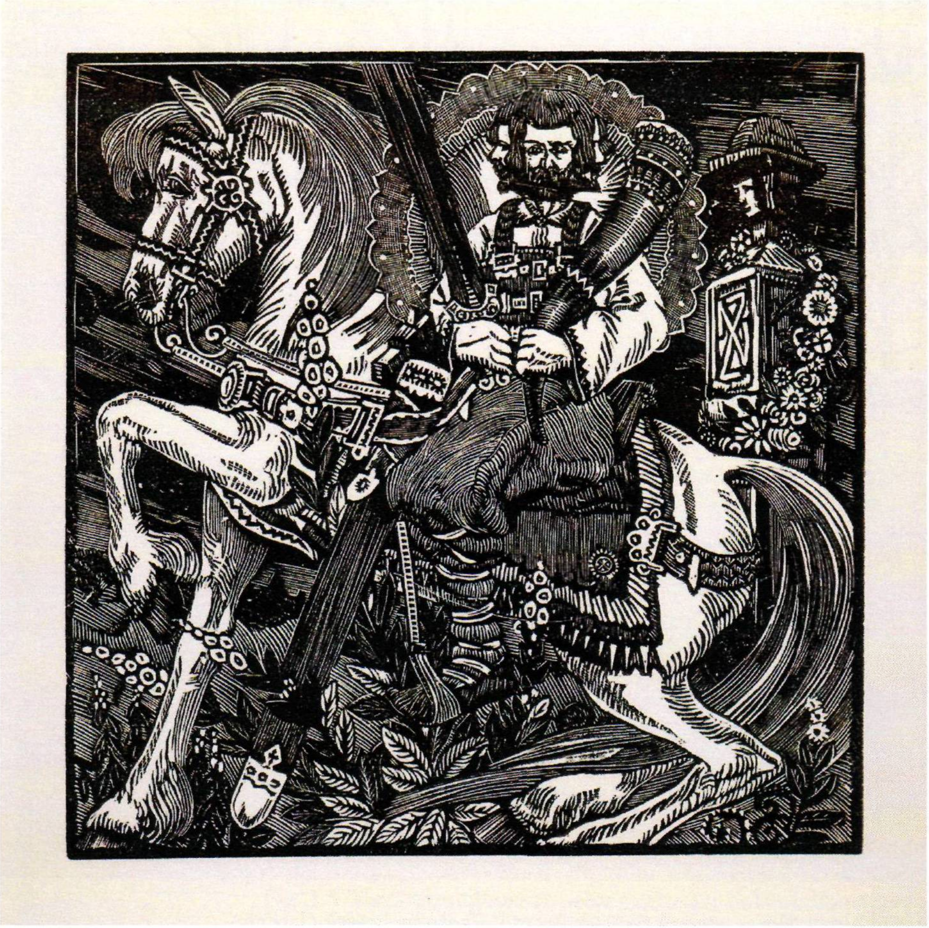

Fig. 1.7. Artistic impression of Sventovit by Stanisław Jakubowski. After Jakubowski 1933.

myth, where the two gods participated in the creation of the world.[26] Similarly to other gods of the Slavs, Triglav was a polycephalic being and had three heads. Additionally, he is said to have had a black stallion that – in a similar way to the stallion of Sventovit – could be used to foretell the future. We shall return to discussing the different aspects of these two major Slavic deities in Chapter 2, where we will also look at archaeological and iconographic material that may be associated with their cult.

In addition to Sventovit/Perun and Triglav/Weles, sources by chroniclers like Thietmar of Merseburg, Jan Długosz[27] and Nestor record names of several different pre-Christian gods of the Western and Eastern Slavs, including Svarog (Polish *Swaróg*), Svarožic (Polish *Swarożyc*), Radogost, Dadžbog (Polish *Dadźbóg*), Chors, Stribog (Polish *Strzybóg*), Mokoš (Polish *Mokosz*) and others.[28] The major problem with these accounts is that they usually say very little or virtually nothing about the various spheres of activity of the Slavic gods and about their specific prerogatives. Due to the scarce nature of the extant textual materials, over the many years of research into Slavic paganism, discussions have typically focused on linguistic and etymological analyses and in the process of interpretation there has been an inevitable tendency to draw inspirations and parallels from comparative religious studies.[29]

In this context, it is worth mentioning that a number of prominent Polish scholars of Slavic beliefs and mythology in the early twentieth century frequently resorted to what is known in Anglophone scholarship as 'the retrospective method', essentially involving the use of chronologically late sources from a particular cultural milieu to examine its more distant past.[30] To a varying degree, the retrospective approach it is also employed by contemporary researchers like Leszek Paweł Słupecki,[31] Andrzej Szyjewski,[32] Artur Kowalik,[33] Kamil Kajkowski,[34] Paweł Szczepanik[35] and others. While retrospective approaches can indeed bring very fruitful results when they are conducted with caution and academic scrutiny,[36] we must always be aware that the majority of ethnographic accounts that tend to be enthusiastically used in reconstructions of Slavic pre-Christian beliefs are younger than the medieval materials to which they are compared by *at least* 700 years. A review of some of the recently published work on Slavic paganism leads to the conclusion that, because the retrospective method is so deeply anchored in Polish academic traditions and so frequently applied in contemporary research, scholars tend to forget about these essential source-critical problems. As a result, far too many claims have been made about pre-Christian Slavic beliefs based on problematic and late comparative evidence. Over time these have become accepted as established truths instead of tentative hypotheses. Based on the tone of some of the published works, certain scholars seem to boldly assume that the culture, ritual practices, and beliefs of the Slavs remained constant and unchanged from early medieval times until the nineteenth century – such views are obviously unjustified and impossible to maintain.

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[26] See, for example, Tomiccy 1975; Szyjewski 2003.

[27] On Długosz and his account, see Gieysztor 2006, pp. 37–39.

[28] The English variants of the gods' names are taken from Słupecki 1994, p. 9. For more details about different textual sources and the Slavic deities that they mention, see Słupecki 1994, p. 9; Szyjewski 2003; Gieysztor 2006.

[29] See especially the early works of scholars like Brückner 1918; 1924; 1985 and Urbańczyk 1947; 1991.

[30] For example, Brückner 1918; 1924; 1980; Urbańczyk 1947; 1948; 1991; Pełka 1960; Tomiccy 1975; Gieysztor 2006. For a thorough review and discussion of the methodologies employed

Regardless of the different methodological nuances and problems that studies of pre-Christian Slavic beliefs entail, the supernatural world imagined by these people was undoubtedly remarkably rich and diverse. It is also clear that there seem to have been different gods and supernatural beings among different tribes and perhaps even among different individuals as well, depending on social, chronological and geographical circumstances. The combined picture given by textual and archaeological sources demonstrates unequivocally that the Slavs resorted to a plethora of ritual acts to address, worship and gain advantages from these various divine and supernatural entities (**Fig. 1.9** and **Fig. 1.10**). In conducting our studies, we must therefore fully acknowledge the fact that, as in the case of Viking Age Scandinavia,[37] it is difficult to speak of a 'religion' of the Slavs – there was no holy book to follow and no sense of strict orthodoxy. Rather, what emerges from the sources that we have at hand is a more or less coherent 'worldview' comprising various ideas and customs, some of which – at least on a superficial level – were shared over vast territories and among larger groups of people, while others were very personal or even unique to specific areas or individuals.

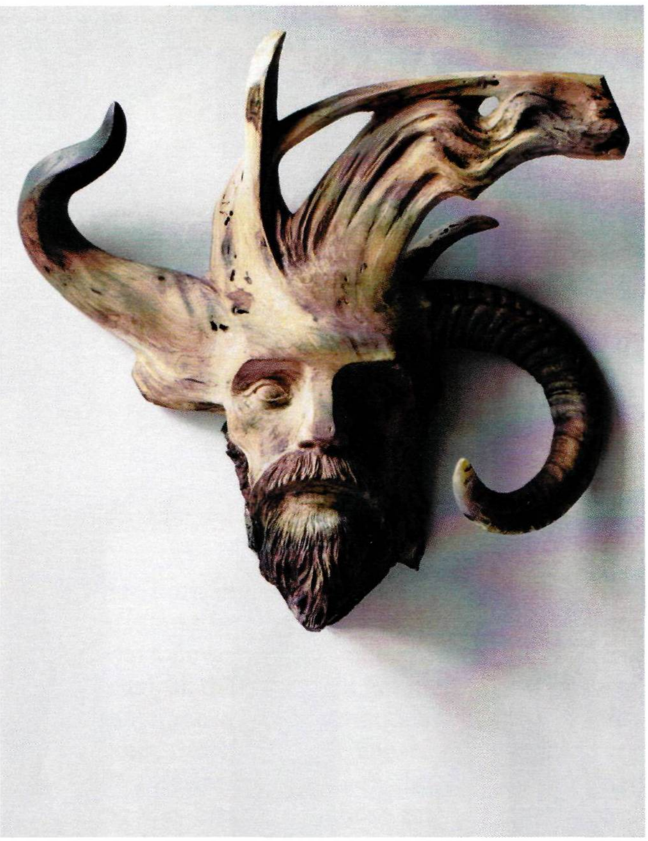

Fig. 1.8. Artistic impression of Weles. Sculpture and photo by Mirosław Kuźma. Used by kind permission.

As highlighted above, this study focuses on a very particular aspect of Slavic beliefs which was tangibly expressed in non-normative funerary acts known as 'atypical burials'. Archaeological traces of these acts often seem peculiar or even gruesome to their modern interpreters and tend to be interpreted as preventive

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by early scholars of Slavic beliefs and archaeologists, see Słupecki 2006; 2007.

[31] Słupecki 1994; 2006.

[32] Szyjewski 2003.

[33] Kowalik 2004.

[34] Kajkowski 2015a; 2015b.

[35] Szczepanik 2010, pp. 29–30, 39.

[36] It is worth noting that a special journal devoted to retrospective methods has been established. The *Retrospective Methods Network Newsletter* is a bi-annual publication of Folklore Studies/Department of Philosophy, History, Culture and Art Studies at the University of Helsinki. The journal is open-access and can be found online: www.helsinki.fi/folkloristiikka/English/RMN/index.htm (accessed 1.04.2017).

[37] With regard to the problems of 'religion' and diversity in Viking Age Scandinavia, see Schjødt 2009; Raudvere, Schjødt 2012.

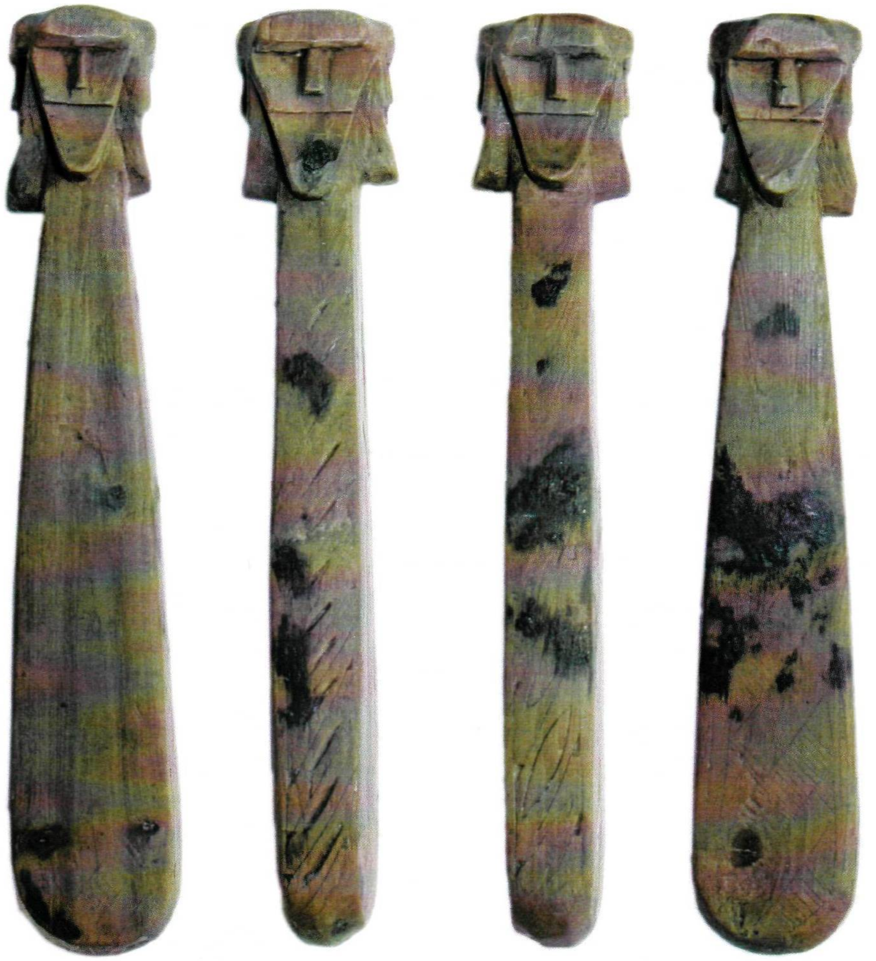

Fig. 1.9. Four-headed figure from Wolin *perhaps representing Sventovit.* Photo by Leszek Gardeła.

measures that past societies undertook to protect themselves against the living dead or 'vampires'.

Although it might come as a surprise, early medieval written accounts of the Slavic world (including the area of Poland specifically) say virtually *nothing* about revenants; the different names eagerly attributed to the living dead in today's scholarship – like *wampir*, *upiór*, *strzyga* etc. – originate from early modern sources dating between the seventeenth and twentieth centuries. This does not necessarily have to mean that there was no belief in revenants among the early medieval Slavs, however. The conviction that some of the deceased could return to the world of the living is a widespread and cross-cultural phenomenon,[38] so for the Slavs to have lacked this idea would make them a very odd exception indeed. While not dismissing the idea that *some* non-normative burials may have belonged to people who were feared of returning to cause harm to the living, this study sets out to explore alternative interpretations of these funerary phenomena. In doing so, the first essential step we need to take is to set them into the context of the idea of 'bad death'.

3. GOOD DEATH VS BAD DEATH

According to the French historian, Claude Lecouteux, a 'good death' was:

> (…) one that crowned a good and beautiful life. It was an accomplishment and a summit for which a person prepared his entire life (…) Posthumous destiny depended on it, because the dead formed a community close to that of the living.

Good death is also one that is accompanied by all the appropriate rites of passage. We know from various sources from around the world that, if any of the mortuary rituals were disturbed or conducted in haphazard, clumsy or otherwise unsatisfactory manner,

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[38] *For cross-cultural studies on medieval revenants see, for* example, Caciola 1996; Schmidt 1998; Blair 2009; Lecouteux 2009; Gardeła 2013b; 2013c.

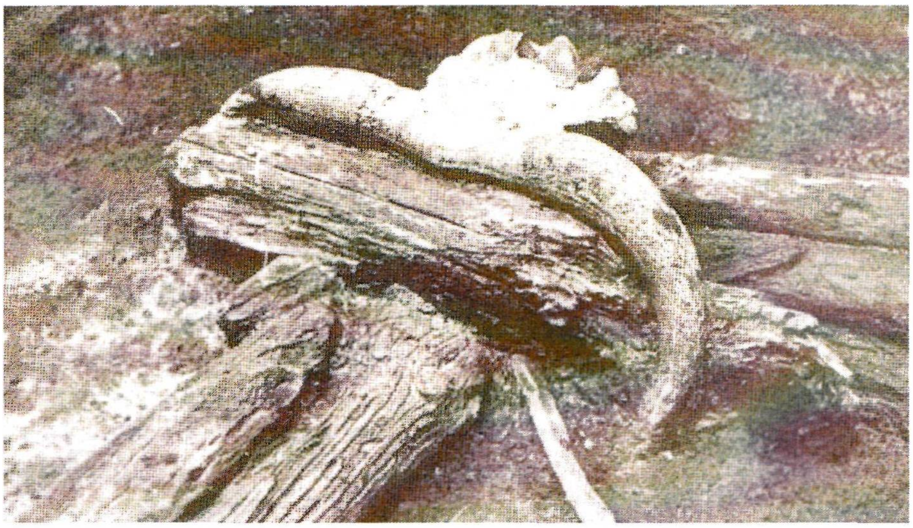

Fig. 1.10. Skull of an aurochs deposited in the corner of one of the early medieval houses at Nakło, Poland. After Gieysztor 2006.

there was a risk that the dead could return.[39] Lecouteux expands on this idea further and observes that:

> The good death was one that had been accompanied by consecrated rites, from the prescribed funeral toiletries to the return to the stone garden, one that was followed by a vigil or wake, a period of mourning, gestures – such as those vouched for still in recent times, including covering mirrors, stopping pendulums, announcing the death to domestic animals, taking a tile from the roof to enable the soul to fly away, and so forth – prayers and a meal accompanied by donations to the poor. These rituals had to be followed to the letter, otherwise there was every reason to fear the dead man: he would return to claim his due.[40]

Bad death is essentially the opposite. In history and archaeology, the term 'bad death' is frequently used to describe situations where people died in unnatural, gruesome or violent ways which sometimes also resulted in special or 'atypical' funerary treatment. In the beliefs of many past societies, people who died a bad death were particularly prone to becoming revenants. An excellent description of the different facets of bad death is provided yet again by Lecouteux. Among the individuals that could be feared of *post-mortem* activity, he includes:

> (…) suicides; people whose life had been cut short by the blade, the noose, water, or fire; and anyone else who died prematurely (*immaturi, aori*). We can add to this number those whose lives were the cause for anxiety in their communities: all those who were called wizards or witches; men or women of bad character; those who displayed a particular physical trait or birth mark; those who were born on certain days or at certain times of the year; those born with a caul or double dentition; those who followed certain trades (blacksmiths, loggers, shepherds); all those who did not melt into the mass of their contemporaries (the marginal, the sacrilegious, the jealous, those who were abused during their lives and felt a desire for revenge); those whose manner of dying was bizarre or whose inhumation was not performed in accordance with the rituals; those who had no graves (*insepulti*); those who were buried without the sacraments or in a place that did not suit them or even next to a detested neighbor; and, finally, those whose funerary dress or shroud was inadequate. Then there are also those who left a task unfinished, children of tender years, a promise unkept, or a vow unfulfilled; and those whose passing was mourned too greatly: their shrouds were soaked with grievers' tears and they are unable to rest in peace.[41]

Signals that someone died a bad death or was considered a social outcast can sometimes be 'read' from funerary evidence; the strongest arguments for it are usually provided by the cases of the so-called deviant or atypical burials. Let us now take a closer look at how they are currently understood and defined in different scholarly traditions.

4. INTRODUCING THE PHENOMENON OF DEVIANT OR ATYPICAL BURIALS

Over the last decade or so, the phenomenon of deviant burials in various cultural milieus has been attracting increased attention from historians, archaeologists, and folklorists worldwide. Early medieval examples of deviant burials have been the subject of particular scholarly interest, and their different variants have been discussed in numerous articles and books reviewing and interpreting non-normative funerary behaviour among the Anglo-Saxons, Scandinavians, Slavs and Finno-Ugrians.[42] Of course, depending on the region, cultural context and chronological period, these non-normative ways of treating the dead could acquire different forms and have various characteristics, but as Edeltraud Aspöck has recently observed:

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[39] Keyworth 2007, pp. 121–122; Garas 2010, p. 58; Lecouteux 2010, p. 29; Gordon 2017.

[40] Lecouteux 2010, p. 29.

[41] Lecouteux 2010, p. 26.

> (...) the minimal definition of 'deviant burials' that most archaeologists would agree to is that they are burials different from the normative burial ritual of the respective period, region and/or cemetery. These differences may occur in body position or treatment, location or construction of the grave or types of grave goods.[43]

Although the term 'deviant burial' is widely used in modern academia, it is important to note that it holds negative connotations and may be misleading. Aspöck rightly observes that using it can cause confusion among readers, since it makes it unclear whether the buried person was regarded as a social deviant or if the burial itself was perverse.[44] In non-Anglophone scholarly traditions, alternative and more neutral terms are used to refer to the same burial phenomena, for example: atypical burial/grave (in Polish *pochówek atypowy* or *grób atypowy* in Danish *atypisk grav*), extraordinary burial/grave (in French *extraordinaire*, *atypique*) or special grave/burial (in German *Sonderbestattung*). One thing that these terms have in common is that they all emphasise a certain 'otherness' of the funerary practice and/or the buried individual, but in contrast to the term 'deviant burial' they do not bring forth any immediately negative connotations.

Bearing these terminological controversies in mind, in my discussions of non-normative funerary practices among the Slavs in early medieval Poland, I have chosen to use the term 'atypical burial' instead; although it is still biased in some ways, this term is certainly more neutral than 'deviant burial' and without negative undertones. However, in using the term 'atypical' it is always essential to define what is 'typical' for a particular society in a particular area or period of time, and to bear in mind that what may be atypical in one place, may not be so elsewhere, even within the same group of people.

To acknowledge the relativity of archaeological evidence and set atypical burials against a wider background, the next chapter will offer a comprehensive overview of what may be regarded as 'normative' funerary practices in Poland. This will be followed by four detailed chapters on the most evocative examples of atypical burials in Poland, namely prone burials, stonings, decapitations and various cases of grave disturbance. All this material will also be discussed in the context of similar funerary phenomena among the Anglo-Saxons and Viking Age Scandinavians. Cross-cultural comparisons with these two cultural milieus are justified because in the early medieval period they both underwent similar ideological and political changes to the Slavs in Poland. A further argument for this comparative approach is that non-normative funerary practices among the Anglo-Saxons and Viking Age Scandinavians have now been extensively discussed and there are a number of thorough overviews based on substantial and reliable datasets. The fact the Scandinavians and Anglo-Saxons were not immediate neighbours of the Western Slavs that inhabited the area of Poland in the Early Middle Ages should not be seen as a problem. Rather, in the case of research on atypical burial practices, it should be regarded as an advantage, since it gives us a chance to explore conceptual parallels between these three different societies at the turning point between tribal and state organization in the turbulent period between paganism and Christianity.

I am aware that a range of studies of atypical burials in other Slavic countries (especially the Czech Republic and Slovakia) have been undertaken, but – to my knowledge – this material has not yet been subjected to comprehensive and systematic analysis.[45] Therefore, I have decided to leave these studies out of the scope of my comparative analysis in this monograph.

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[42] See, for example, Krumphanzlová 1961; 1964; Geake 1992; Navrátilová 1992; Hanuliak 1995; 1999; Caciola 1996; Stanaszek 1998; 1999; 2000; 2001; 2007; 2016a; 2016b; Wrzesiński 2000a; 2000b; 2000c; 2008a; 2008b; Grodzka 2001; Żydok 2004; Artelius 2005; Wickholm 2006; Biermann 2008; Falis 2008; 2013; Murphy 2008; Porzeziński 2008; Blair 2009; Brather 2009; Reynolds 2009; Garas 2010; Gardeła 2010b; 2011a; 2011b; 2012a; 2012b; 2012c; 2013a; 2013b; 2013c; 2015a; 2015b; 2016c; in press a; in press b; in press d; Koperkiewicz 2010; Skóra, Kurasiński 2010; Kajkowski 2012; Gardeła, Kajkowski 2013a; 2013b; 2015a; 2015b; Klevnäs 2013; 2015c; Kubicka 2014; Matczak 2014; Toplak 2015; 2016; Franz, Nösler 2016; Parvanov 2016 – all with further references.

[43] Aspöck 2008, p. 17.

[44] Aspöck 2008, p. 29.

[45] See, for example, Krumphanzlová 1961; 1964; Navrátilová 1992; Hanuliak 1995; 1999; Sikora 2010; Čechura 2011.

Before moving further in our discussion of atypical burials from early medieval Poland, the two sections below aim to provide brief overviews of past and current research into non-normative funerary practices among the Anglo-Saxons and Viking Age Scandinavians.

Deviant burials in Anglo-Saxon archaeology: An overview

When British archaeologists of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries came across graves that differed significantly from what was considered 'the norm', they would sometimes argue that the dead were buried by drunk undertakers or simply people who were too lazy to dig a grave of sufficient length.[46] Today, the problem of non-normative funerary phenomena is no longer swept under the rug and serious academic interest in deviant burial practices is growing at a rapid speed.

The term 'deviant burial' was first used by the British archaeologist Helen Geake in 1992, but it took another fifteen years or so until the Anglophone world developed a more serious post-processual interest in burial practices differing from the norm. A groundbreaking moment in Anglophone research was the publication of an edited volume entitled *Deviant Burial in the Archaeological Record*.[47] This important collection of papers arose as a result of a session organised at the 11th annual conference of the European Association of Archaeologists in Cork, Ireland, and covers a wide range of topics related to social deviance, spanning various geographical areas and chronological periods. The articles not only discuss the phenomenon of deviant burial in a broad historical and theoretically-driven perspective,[48] but also with the wider context of paleo-teratology and forensic pathology. In a seminal paper included in this volume, Edeltraud Aspöck rightly observes:[49]

> Deviant burials incorporate many of the aspects of 'post-processualism', such as individualism, agency and marginal groups in society. This is in contrast with the focus of processual studies on society as a system, in which 'deviant burials' were one part of burial practices, but otherwise unimportant. In the context of 'post-processual' archaeology 'deviant burials' are not only a by-product of mortuary practices of any society but also of major interest.

In 2009, only a year after the release of this important edited collection, Andrew Reynolds published his monograph entitled *Anglo-Saxon Deviant Burial Customs*.[50] The primary aim of his study is to present non-normative burial practices from England in their totality. To do so, he examines atypical graves in chronological order, beginning with finds from the fifth to seventh centuries and ending with finds from the seventh to eleventh centuries. Due to the large number of examples in his dataset, he refrains from discussing each of the graves in detail, but nevertheless provides valuable remarks on the different patterns of mortuary behaviour that emerge from his comprehensive analysis. He also pays special attention to their spatial and geographical context.[51] By doing so, he provides 'a narrative for the development of place and space as status indicators in contrast to traditional approaches based on wealth and assessments of the investment of labour in the burial of the dead'.[52] His analysis of funerary evidence identifies the defining characteristics of deviant burials in Anglo-Saxon society, which include:[53]

- Crouched burial
- Multiple burial
- Shallow and cramped burial
- Prone burial
- Decapitation
- Stoning
- Evidence for restraint, mutilation, and miscellaneous disrespectful treatment of corpses

Reynolds' observations on the use of space and the wider landscape context of atypical burials in the Anglo-Saxon world, as well as the various innovative methods of analysis which he employs in his study, all inform the comparative approach to the archaeological materials from Poland that shall be conducted in the following chapters of this monograph.

In addition to the seminal work of Reynolds, another important study on Anglo-Saxon deviant burial practices is an article by Dawn Hadley entitled *Burying the Socially and Physically Distinctive in Later Anglo-Saxon England* from 2010, where the focus is more on osteological evidence.[54] She observes that the majority of unusual burials in the late Anglo-

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[46] Aspöck 2008, p. 23.

[47] Murphy 2008.

[48] Tsaliki 2008.

[49] Aspöck 2008, p. 27.

[50] Reynolds 2009.

[51] Reynolds 2009, pp. 180–234.

[52] Reynolds 2009, p. 181.

[53] Reynolds 2009, p. 62.

[54] Hadley 2010.

Saxon period cemeteries were male,[55] and that most of the graves at execution cemeteries also belong to men. Interestingly, all those individuals who were buried in a manner that could be considered deviant were relatively young (between 15 and 30 years of age), which implies that young men 'were more likely to engage in the kinds of behaviour that resulted in them being excluded from normative burial'.[56] Based on analyses of skeletal remains, Hadley also makes the significant observation that individuals who suffered from various physical impairments were rarely buried in a manner that was different from how a 'normal' person was treated.[57] Therefore, people with various kinds of pathologies could, like others, be buried in coffins, or with stones placed around the head (interpreted, for example, as a mark of affection) or beneath stone slabs. Nonetheless, there have been several cases from England where physically handicapped individuals were buried outside churchyards or at the borders of consecrated ground. Hadley argues that issues of personality and behavior may have been responsible for the atypical burial of these people rather than their physical impairments. However, it is also vital to remember that, in the Anglo-Saxon world, where the display of masculinity was so significant, any physical imperfection 'was a bar to the holding of office, fulfillment of military duties, participation in religious life and representation before the law'.[58]

The problem of non-normative funerary behaviour is also discussed in a recent article by Sally Crawford, entitled *Differentiation in the Later Anglo-Saxon Burial Ritual on the Basis of Mental and Physical Impairment: A Documentary Perspective*.[59] In this study, Crawford seeks to find documentary evidence for the treatment of individuals who were mentally or physically impaired and examines how impairment may have affected the social status of an individual. This approach allows her to provide a wider social context for some of the later Anglo-Saxon deviant burials discussed in earlier works. Similar to the aforementioned study of Reynolds, she teases out the relevant evidence from judicial sources. By using law codes from the seventh and ninth centuries, issued by Æthelbert and Alfred respectively, she makes the important observation that physical impairment may have had a significant influence on a person's social status, both for noblemen and for slaves. For example, it was important for a free man to be able to walk, hear, speak and see; without these abilities he would have been incapable of undertaking his responsibilities in adult life. As Crawford argues, 'to be unable to carry out these duties through physical or mental impairment would have inevitably had a depressing effect on a man's status'.[60] After the conversion, mental and physical impairments were perceived ambivalently – as either a blessing, or a condemnation, or even as a sign of demonic possession. Many impairments had strong religious overtones[61] and we know that during the rule of Cnut, individuals who were incapable of following royal decrees and unable to learn prayers (the Lord's Prayer and the Creed were considered obligatory for any 'true' Christian) could be denied burial in consecrated ground.[62] This rule could potentially apply to deaf or mute people, even those with severe speech or hearing impairments. As a consequence, such individuals could have been buried outside the churchyard cemetery or somewhere on its margins. From the early Anglo-Saxon period to the ninth century, children's burials were also placed in various locations within secular settlements, and, from the tenth century onwards, by the church walls. Some children may not have been buried at all. Of course, non-formal burials were also conducted for individuals accused of serious offences.[63] In some cases, the accused could be severely mutilated (this could involve scalping, the cutting of the nose, ears and limbs, etc.) and their bodies left in open fields. Crawford concludes her paper by arguing that the physical impairment of some bodies found within so-called deviant graves is not necessarily an '*a-priori* explanation for non-normative interments'.[64] She admits that impairments could have resulted in these individuals having a lower social status, but again this would not necessarily have required them to be buried in a strikingly different way from the rest of Anglo-Saxon society. These observations are also worth bearing in mind when encountering and interpreting atypical funerary phenomena from early medieval Poland.

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[55] Hadley 2010, p. 107.

[56] Hadley 2010, p. 107.

[57] Hadley 2010, p. 110.

[58] Hadley 2010, p. 111.

[59] Crawford 2010.

[60] Crawford 2010, p. 95.

[61] Crawford 2010, pp. 96–100.

[62] Crawford 2010, p. 99.

[63] Crawford 2010, pp. 99–100.

[64] Crawford 2010, p. 100.

Atypical burials in Viking Age Scandinavia: An overview

In researching atypical burials from Viking Age Scandinavia, we are faced with a range of methodological problems. Over the last decade or so, it has been continuously emphasised that the mortuary behaviour of the Viking Age Scandinavians was extremely diverse, on both a local and a supra-local scale.[65] Funerary practices varied not only geographically, but also chronologically throughout the Viking diaspora. Archaeological evidence shows that mourners generally inhumed and/or cremated their dead, but both types of burial acquired multiple forms. In the case of inhumation graves, the dead could be positioned in multiple ways – supine, flexed or even seated. The internal and external structure of graves also showed great variety. Likewise, the type, quality and quantity of objects and animals that accompanied the dead also differed from place to place. Bearing all this in mind, it is not always easy to distinguish what is 'atypical' from what is 'normal'. In a general sense, however, despite the remarkable diversity in treatment of the dead, it is still possible for an archaeologist to distinguish certain types of burials which deviated from others within a particular cemetery or region.

One of the first more detailed and theoretically-driven discussions of atypical burials from Viking Age Scandinavia was included in Eva Thäte's monograph on the re-use of ancient monuments, entitled *Monuments and Minds: Monument Re-use in Scandinavia in the Second Half of the First Millenium.*[66] In one of its chapters, she devotes a brief section to defining what could be considered a deviant burial in Viking Age mortuary archaeology:[67]

> (...) a burial has been regarded as 'deviant' when it differed from the normative burial custom. Status indicators are excluded from the list of 'deviant' criteria (although status may in some cases have been a reason for the special treatment of a deceased).

Bearing this in mind, Thäte isolates several categories of deviant burial based on the following characteristics:[68]

- Marked variation in orientation (e.g. east-west oriented graves in a cemetery where west-east orientation is common)
- Non-normative body position in the grave (e.g. flexed or prone positions of bodies in a cemetery where supine position is prevailing)
- Multiple burial, reused graves (within the same period), intersecting graves (within the same period)
- Physical variation such as injury or 'abnormality' in the skeletal evidence
- Special treatment of the body, such as decapitation, tied limbs, stones on parts of the body, or a knife placed in the hand
- Unusual grave goods, such as fossils, shells, etc., which do not indicate wealth and have no obvious technical function, and may therefore have had a symbolic meaning

An important conclusion that arises from studies of Viking Age deviant burials is their disparity. At the Danish cemetery at Kumlhøj, for example, half of the deceased were buried in a flexed position, which implies that this practice need not necessarily signal 'deviance', but rather that it was a common custom for the community who used the site.[69] Based on this evidence, and other more recent studies,[70] it seems impossible to provide a single explanation for the phenomenon of so-called 'deviant burials'. Instead, to unravel their underlying meanings it is essential to analyse them from as many angles as possible, always trying to place them into a wider context – local, regional and even supra-regional.

Thäte rightly notes that 'it cannot be ruled out that what has been identified as 'deviant' was a common custom for a particular society in a particular area',[71] and she further adds that almost none of the sites which she discusses in her work consist only of 'deviant burials' (the exception being Kumle Høje in Denmark). This may lead to the conclusion that, at least in death, 'deviants' were integrated into society. With the exception of mass graves, the available evidence suggests that those who were different, either in appearance or profession, could nonetheless be buried within a 'normal' cemetery alongside other, more ordinary people. In this sense, deviant burials from Viking Age Scandinavia are similar to those from early medieval Poland. It is also noteworthy that they began to emerge during the period of Christianisation and thus could sometimes represent an intriguing blending of pagan and Christian conceptions.

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[65] Svanberg 2003; Price 2008a; 2008b; 2010.

[66] Thäte 2007.

[67] Thäte 2007, p. 266.

[68] Thäte 2007, pp. 266–267.

[69] Thäte 2007, p. 270.

[70] See, for example, Gardeła 2012b; 2012c; 2013b; 2013c; Toplak 2015; 2016.

[71] Thäte 2007, p. 272.

In my recent work, I have thoroughly expanded some of the views offered by Thäte, and focused my attention on several of her different categories of deviant burials. In my doctoral dissertation, for example, I conducted a thorough analysis of graves in which stones were placed directly on the deceased,[72] and in an extensive recently published article I have discussed the motif of decapitation.[73] These and other works form a good basis for comparing the Scandinavian evidence with the materials from the Slavic world; we will return to them in the chapters that follow.

5. THE AIM OF THE STUDY

As we have seen, in recent times the notion of atypical or deviant burial has become increasingly popular in Great Britain and Scandinavia, where it is explored in an interdisciplinary way not only by archaeologists, but also by historians, sociologists, anthropologists, historians of religion and philologists. In Western and Northern Europe, atypical burials are also often associated with the aforementioned idea of 'bad death' – i.e. death in dramatic circumstances or which evokes fear among the community.

So far in Polish archaeology, attempts to explore atypical burials from a comparative perspective, by drawing theoretical and methodological inspiration from various fields in the humanities, have been very limited. Apart from several preliminary and popular studies, no serious and comprehensive attempt has been made to better understand the various forms, underlying meanings, and genesis of this practice.[74] Old, dogmatic views of deviant burial are still uncritically accepted today, and have led to neglectful and unsubstantiated conclusions which distort our perception of the past.

Therefore, the main aim of this monograph is to analyse the broad spectrum of Polish early medieval 'atypical burials' in a comparative perspective, with the application of methods drawn from the fields of anthropology, sociology and history of religions. For the first time, this phenomenon will be confronted using sources from other parts of Europe (especially England and Scandinavia),[75] in acknowledgement of its wider context, meaning, and historical and ideological background. Although in the majority of Polish publications atypical burials are regarded as signs of 'anti-vampire practices', in the light of comparative sources it seems that they may have been associated with many other notions. The hypothesis advocated throughout this book is that these burials are not only connected with individuals who the local communities feared would become living-dead. Rather, comparative evidence from different parts of the early medieval world implies that some of them can be explained by judicial practices (e.g. the execution of criminals) and various methods for dealing with suicide victims, magic workers and other social deviants. Moreover, it is probable that some so-called atypical burials could have resulted from traumatic circumstances that affected past societies – plagues, brutal attacks, mass murders and other unfortunate events. Essentially, each case is different and a more individualised approach is needed to tease out these nuances.

What follows is a thorough analysis of the diverse corpus of Polish early medieval atypical burials dated between the late tenth and thirteenth centuries which were excavated between the beginning of the twentieth century and the present day. My analyses are based on published archaeological reports and involve re-evaluating archival materials from museums and other scientific institutions in Poland. After an overview of 'the Slavic way of death' and a historiographical survey of past approaches to atypical burials, the next four chapters will explore four of the major categories of non-normative mortuary practices from Poland (prone burials, stoned burials, decapitated burials and disturbed burials) against the wider background of similar funerary behaviour from England and Scandinavia. It is hoped that this methodology will enable a thorough reappraisal and greater understanding of the phenomenon of atypical funerary practices in Poland, and that it will allow for previously proposed, and often uncritically accepted, academic dogmas to be revised, thereby opening up new perspectives for scholarly inquiry.

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[72] Gardeła 2012c.

[73] Gardeła 2013b.

[74] But see the works of Stanaszek 1998; 1999; 2001; 2007; 2016a; 2016b; Żydok 2004; Falis 2008; Wrzesiński 2008b.

[75] But see the preliminary work of Gardeła 2011b where Slavic graves with stones were discussed in the context of similar examples from Scandinavia and Anglo-Saxon England.

CHAPTER 2
FROM NAWIA TO HEAVEN: THE SLAVIC WAY OF DEATH

In order to reveal the intricate meanings of mortuary customs among the Slavs in the period spanning the tenth to thirteenth centuries, it is necessary to examine their worldviews and beliefs both before and after the introduction of Christianity. Although the new religion had already been accepted by the ruling elite of the Piast dynasty in the mid-tenth century, it is clear that past traditions, originating in pagan times, did not cease to exist in an instant, but often competed with the official teachings of the Church.[1] Many pre-Christian ideas were so deeply rooted in the minds of common people that they continued to find expression in everyday behaviour, material culture and mortuary customs for centuries after the conversion and, in some regards, traces of them can still be seen today.

This chapter sets the stage for our further discussions of atypical funerary practices in Poland by providing an overview of Slavic mortuary customs and eschatological beliefs in this part of Central Europe. In particular, it focuses on the performance and symbolic undertones of funerals and on the possible meanings of different objects that accompanied the deceased in their graves. Ideas about the existence of various *post-mortem* destinations for the Slavic dead are explored through analyses of archaeological evidence, medieval textual accounts, and ethnographic sources.

1. DEALING WITH THE DEAD IN EARLY MEDIEVAL POLAND

Surviving funerary evidence, in the form of grave contents dating from the tenth to the thirteenth centuries, forms the main point of reference in any attempts to explore Slavic eschatological beliefs in early medieval Poland. Although archaeological remains are silent and static, a careful reading, contextual analysis, and interpretation of them can help to unravel the dynamics and symbolic meaning of various ritual acts conducted before, during and after the funeral.[2] In some instances, past mortuary acts may also be illuminated by extant textual accounts recorded by medieval chroniclers and travellers. These written sources are often contemporary with the archaeological evidence that will be analysed here, but most of them were put to parchment by foreign observers and as such must be always approached with considerable caution. It should also be emphasised that extant descriptions of Slavic funerals mainly pertain to cremations; we have very little information about the meanings that underpinned the custom of inhumation. Due to insufficient textual information about Slavic inhumations, in attempting to understand these practices we are usually forced to refer to comparative materials from different cultural milieus (e.g. Scandinavian, Anglo-Saxon and other) and to use ethnographic sources in our analyses. Although most ethnographic accounts on aspects of dying and death among the Slavs are very late (they were collected in the nineteenth and early twentieth century by folklorists and anthropologists), it is possible to occasionally find within them traces of much older traditions which prevailed through the ages.

For the sake of methodological clarity, the following analysis of the 'Slavic way of death' will adopt a chronological approach to the different categories of sources mentioned above. We will therefore begin with an overview of archaeological evidence, which demonstrates various ways of dealing with the dead in early medieval Poland, both before and after the acceptance of Christianity, i.e. between the ninth and thirteenth centuries. Wherever it is relevant and justified from a source-critical perspective, an attempt will be made to interweave and compare the archaeological material with information drawn from medieval texts and later Slavic ethnography. This will be followed by a discussion of the portrayals of Slavic cosmological ideas in early medieval iconography. The final sections of this chapter will discuss a range of textual and ethnographic sources that could potentially offer hints about Slavic ideas of the Otherworld.

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[1] On the different facets of the process of Christianisation in early medieval Pomerania (and Poland), see Rębkowski 2007.

[2] For general works on the archaeology of death see, for example, Arnold, Wicker 2001; Taylor 2002; Parker Pearson 2009; Sayer, Williams 2009; Williams, Giles 2016.

Early medieval funerary archaeology in Poland: An overview

In order to provide a solid background to further debates on aspects of dying and death among the Slavs, we must begin with an overview of past and present trends and trajectories in the study of early medieval funerary archaeology in Poland.

The funerary practices of the early medieval Slavs who lived in what is now Poland started to attract academic attention at the end of the nineteenth century. Among the first professional scholars who excavated graves and published articles or books on various issues relating to death among the Slavs were N.P. Avenarius, A.H. Kirkor, W. Olechnowicz, A. Stubenrauch and R. Virchow.[3] Some of these early researchers were initially convinced that the custom of cremation was characteristic of Germanic societies, and that these graves belonged not to the Slavs but to people who migrated to Poland from Scandinavia.[4] In time, however, these highly problematic views gradually began to change, especially after the discoveries of cremation graves with typically Slavic furnishings.[5]

The first overview works on the funerary practices of the early medieval Slavs in Poland started to appear at the beginning of the twentieth century. In the 1920s the number of known early medieval cemeteries increased considerably as a result of both amateur and professional excavations in various parts of the country, but at that time most sites were not analysed systematically, and only limited surveys were conducted. One particularly valuable work from this period is a publication of the burial mounds from Orzeszkowo in Western Pomerania written by Gerhard Bersu, a renowned German archaeologist (**Fig. 2.1**).[6] The techniques of excavation and documentation employed at Orzeszkowo were remarkably meticulous, and it is unfortunate that relatively few scholars in the early twentieth century aspired to conduct their work in a similar way while investigating other Slavic sites (**Fig. 2.2**).

In 1930, Władysław Łęga[7] – a Catholic priest, historian, ethnographer and archaeologist – wrote an extensive monograph entitled *Kultura Pomorza we wczesnem średniowieczu na podstawie wykopalisk* (Eng. *The Culture of Pomerania in the Early Middle Ages Based on Excavations*) focusing on Pomerania in the Early Middle Ages (**Fig. 2.3**). His book included some passages related to funerary practices in that area and discussed selected finds from several important cemeteries. Today, over eighty years after the release of his publication, many of Łęga's interpretations are outdated, but his study nonetheless forms an important cornerstone for research into aspects of early medieval death and burial in Pomerania.

Seven years after the release of Łęga's work, the archaeologist Zdzisław Rajewski[8] published a detailed synthesis of early medieval inhumation cemeteries in Greater Poland (**Fig. 2.4**). Looking at his work from today's perspective, it appears remarkably modern and thorough for its time. Rajewski's study is based on a careful assessment of various archival materials and private antiquarian collections, short press notices, and professional archaeological publications. It also discusses the results of excavations at early medieval cemeteries conducted by Rajewski himself. The first part of his groundbreaking work takes the form of a catalogue and

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[3] For more detailed discussions on these early studies in different parts of Poland see, for example, Rajewski 1937, pp. 28–29; Wojtasik 1968, pp. 3–5; Zoll-Adamikowa 1975, pp. 31–39; Malinowska-Łazarczyk 1982, pp. 9–13, with further references.

[4] See, for example, Schuchhardt 1929; for further details see Kostrzewski 1960, pp. 5–6.

[5] Similar problems were also common in the early days of Anglo-Saxon archaeology. As Lucy 2000, p. 155 writes: 'A 'Germanic' artefact in a grave was interpreted in a very straightforward manner as evidence for a Germanic person being present in that grave, in the same way that jewellery was thought to denote a female'.

[6] Zoll-Adamikowa 1975, p. 32 speaks highly of Gerhard Bersu's work. It is noteworthy that Bersu also contributed significantly to Viking archaeology and excavated a number of graves in the Isle of Man (where he was interned during the Second World War). Similarly to the cemetery at Orzeszkowo, the standards of excavation and documentation in the Isle of Man were exceptionally high.

[7] Łęga 1930. On Władysław Łęga's biography, see Łuka 1960.

[8] Rajewski 1937.

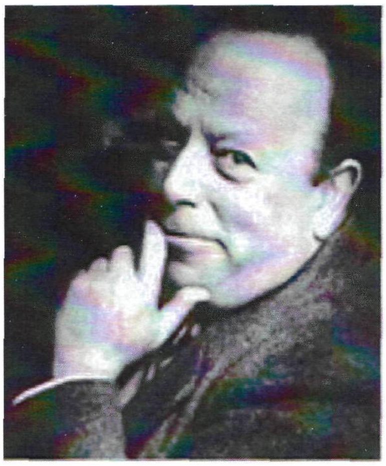

Fig. 2.1. Gerhard Bersu (1889–1964).

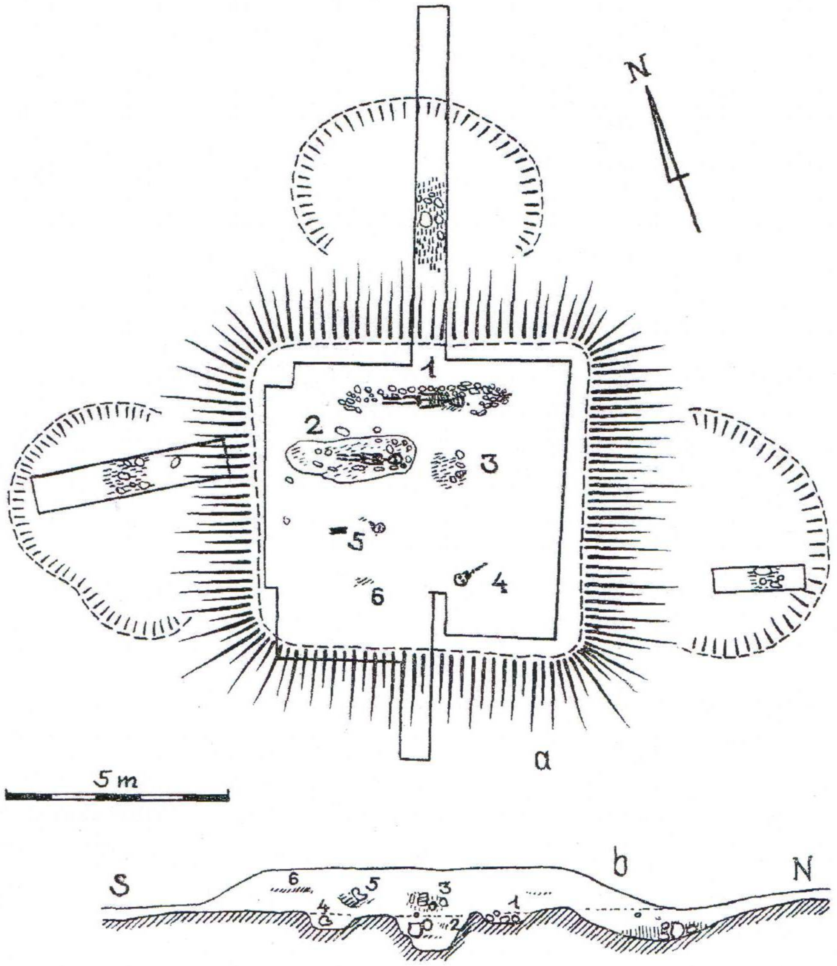

Fig. 2.2. Mound I from Orzeszkowo. After Zoll-Adamikowa 1975, p. 184, and based on Bersu's report from 1925.

is mainly descriptive. It lists the sites in alphabetical order and provides basic information about the number of graves, their external and internal structure, and their furnishings.[9] In some instances, the particular entries in his catalogue are supplemented by additional details regarding the position of bodies in the graves and the locations of various objects that accompanied them. It seems, however, that the biological sex of the deceased was assessed mostly on the basis of the items buried with the dead (in a very traditional manner, weapons were regarded as indicating men and jewellery as indicating women), and not necessarily on an anthropological analysis of the osteological material. In the second part of his study, Rajewski discussed different categories of objects from cemeteries in Greater Poland (e.g. weapons, jewellery, tools, vessels etc.), focusing his attention mainly on their functions, with occasional remarks on their possible symbolic meanings. [10] In addition to this, he examined the location of graves in the landscape, as well as their size and their internal and external structure. It is clear from Rajewski's analysis that the cemeteries in the studied area were generally located on fields or small hills, but some were also on islands or peninsulas (**Fig. 2.5**).[11] The majority of early medieval cemeteries in Greater Poland were established in places which had not been used by prehistoric societies, but there are also a few cases in which older cemeteries were reused.[12]

Over the period spanning the late 1930s and 1960s, a range of early medieval cemeteries were discovered. One example is the remarkable burial site at Lutomiersk near Łódź, which contained graves with very rich furnishings, including weapons, riding equipment and jewellery (**Fig. 2.6**).[13] However, the Nazi occupation of Poland during the Second World War and the damage that it caused meant that the documentation and finds

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[9] Rajewski 1937, pp. 28–48.

[10] Rajewski 1937, pp. 49–85.

[11] Rajewski 1937, p. 50.

[12] Rajewski 1937, p. 51.

[13] On Lutomiersk see Jażdżewski 1951; 1952; Nadolski, Abramowicz, Poklewski 1959 and more recently Grygiel 2014.

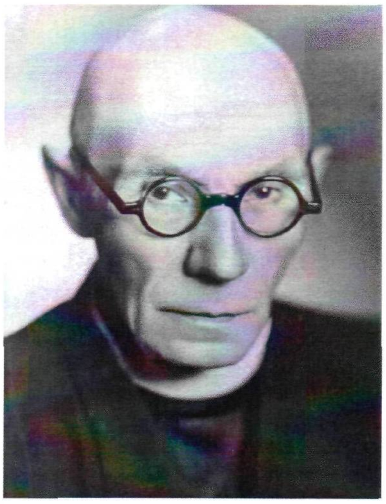

Fig. 2.3. Władysław Łęga (1889–1960).

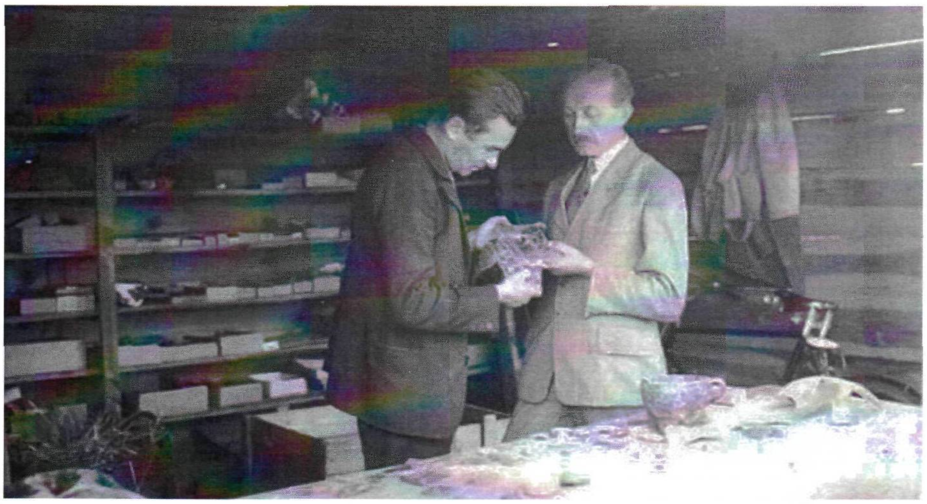

Fig. 2.4. Zdzisław Rajewski (1907–1974) and Józef Kostrzewski (1885–1969).

from past excavations at this site, as well as those from many other places, were severely damaged or sometimes lost forever.

The wartime destruction of Poland and its cultural heritage spurred Polish archaeologists in the 1950s and 1960s to intensify their work and organise numerous excavation campaigns at early medieval sites. All this also had significant political undertones, as it was considered important to find solid arguments demonstrating that the Polish lands had been 'Slavic since time immemorial', thereby dismissing the views of German or Nazi scholars about Germanic supremacy in this part of Europe. The upcoming 1000th anniversary of the Polish state also provided an excellent opportunity to formulate a large-scale research programme known as the 'Millennial Project'.[14]

In 1969, Maria Miśkiewicz published an important synthesis of early medieval funerary practices in Poland, which sought to embrace archaeological materials from all parts of the country.[15] Her article was limited to inhumation graves, however, and did not cover cremation burials, which were examined in detail several years later by Helena Zoll-Adamikowa.[16] The chronological scope of Miśkiewicz's work included graves from 62 cemeteries that dated between the tenth and thirteenth centuries.[17] She was critical of the laconic nature of early publications and the fact that some of the archival cemetery reports were incomplete or lacked important details. The rudimentary character of early studies (especially of cemeteries) remains a problem today, when these archival materials are incorporated into more nuanced analysis. In this context, it is vital to note that, contrary to her predecessors, Miśkiewicz seems to have expressed a great interest in examining the symbolic meanings of funerary procedures and objects buried with the dead.[18] Most importantly, she explicitly demonstrated the diversity of funerary practices in Poland by paying attention to both the external and internal structures of graves.[19]

The general conclusion that arises from her study - and which still holds true - is that most inhumation graves discovered in early medieval Poland were single graves, and that burials of two or more individuals occurred only sporadically.[20] Although empty graves or cenotaphs were also found at some sites, Miśkiewicz did not devote much attention to them in her article.[21] The dead were usually laid in a supine position (albeit with various alignments of the upper limbs), but individuals could on occasion be buried in other ways - for example prone[22] or on the side, sometimes with flexed legs - and there were also cases where the bodies were bound with rope or buried in shrouds.[23]

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[14] On the Millennial Project, see Hensel 1946; 1958; Kobyliński 2015, p. 226; Urbańczyk 2016, pp. 15–33.

[15] Miśkiewicz 1969.

[16] Zoll-Adamikowa 1975; 1979.

[17] Miśkiewicz 1969, p. 242.

[18] Miśkiewicz 1969, pp. 244–245.

[19] Miśkiewicz 1969, p. 246.

[20] Miśkiewicz 1969, pp. 246–247. For a recent reevaluation of double graves in early medieval Poland, see Gardeła, Kajkowski 2014.

[21] Miśkiewicz 1969, p. 247.

[22] For a discussion on prone burials from early medieval Poland, see Gardeła 2011a; 2012a; 2015b and Chapter 4.

[23] Miśkiewicz 1969, p. 247.

Although Miśkiewicz's study was certainly an important step in early medieval funerary archaeology in Poland, it met with heavy criticism from a number of scholars.[24] In 1975, while discussing the *Stand der Forschung* of Polish early medieval cemeteries, Helena Zoll-Adamikowa bluntly stated that the work of Miśkiewicz did not offer any new ideas and that the methodology she employed could only lead to false assumptions.[25] In my view, this opinion is hypercritical and does not acknowledge the great effort which Miśkiewicz put into compiling such a vast body of material for her study. Even though Miśkiewicz's publication *does* contain some errors or omissions, it is unjustified to completely dismiss its academic value.

Only two years after the release of Miśkiewicz's article, a detailed analysis of early medieval cemeteries from the area of Masovia and Podlachia was published by Lechosław Rauhut.[26] His study demonstrates that the presence of stones in the graves' external and internal structures was one of the characteristic features of burials in these areas. Many of the graves contained relatively rich grave goods in the form of weapons (in male burials) or jewellery (in female burials), as well as other items such as pottery, wooden buckets, knives, spindle whorls, strike-a-lights and various small utensils.

In 1975, Krzysztof Wachowski published an important monograph in which he collected and analysed the archaeological materials from early medieval cemeteries in Silesia. His study significantly complemented the previous work of Maria Miśkiewicz where the Silesian materials were treated marginally. Apart from listing all known cemeteries from Silesia, Wachowski assessed their spatial arrangement and the different categories of grave goods that accompanied the deceased. In the traditional spirit of his time, he also provided some remarks on how funerary evidence could be used in studies of social structure. Thanks to earlier publications concerning early medieval cemeteries from other parts of Poland, it was also possible to set the Silesian archaeological material against a wider, comparative background. In general, the Silesian cemeteries included mostly single graves (with very occasional cases of double burials),[27] with the dead buried in a supine position and orientated east-west. The average number of graves at a typical cemetery in that region ranged between 150–200, with the graves usually aligned in rows (as in Greater Poland, for example).[28] Some of the deceased were buried in coffins, and a number of graves contained stones in their internal and external constructions.[29] Among the grave goods were various objects such as jewellery, shells, bronze bells, coins, whetstones, wooden buckets, clay vessels, and occasionally weapons.[30]

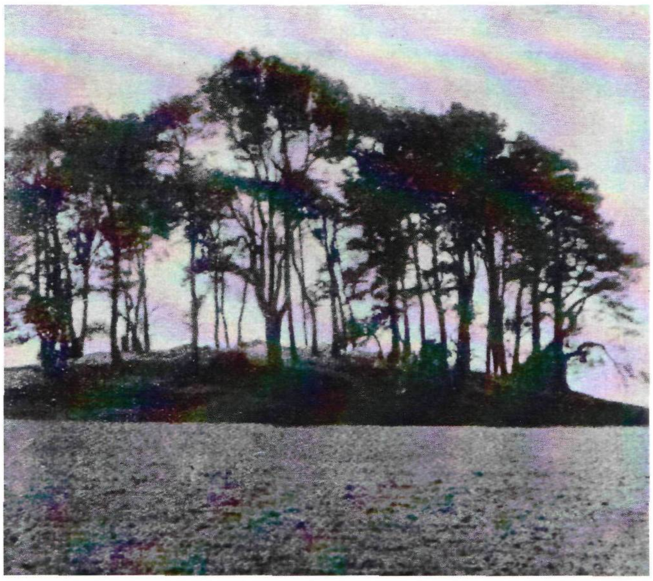

Fig. 2.5. Early medieval cemetery at Wierzenica. After Kostrzewski 1962, p. 333.

Also in 1975, Anna Kufel-Dzierzgowska published an article summarizing funerary evidence from Central Poland.[31] When she wrote her study, 35 burial sites were known from that area, dating between the late tenth and thirteenth centuries. All of them were located on low sandy or gravel hills. Cemeteries in this area were relatively small. Kufel-Dzierzgowska divided them into two groups – smaller cemeteries, which had only a few to about fifty graves, and larger cemeteries, which

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[24] See, for example, Rauhut 1971b; Wachowski 1975, p. 67; Zoll-Adamikowa 1975, p. 37. See also Miśkiewicz 1975 for a response to some of the criticisms.

[25] Zoll-Adamikowa 1975, p. 37 writes: '(…) całościowe ujęcie obrządku szkieletowego w Polsce, pióra M. Miśkiewicz (1969), nie tylko nie wnosi nowych wartości poznawczych, lecz z uwagi na poważne niedociągnięcia warsztatowe budzić musi zastrzeżenia w odniesieniu do poprawności wysnuwanych wniosków' / 'M. Miśkiewicz's analysis of inhumation burials in Poland not only brings nothing new, but due to serious methodological mistakes must raise doubts regarding its conclusions' (Translation by Leszek Gardeła).

[26] Rauhut 1971a.

[27] Wachowski 1975, p. 70.

[28] Wachowski 1975, p. 70.

[29] Wachowski 1975, p. 76.

[30] Wachowski 1975, pp. 35–60, 72.

[31] Kufel-Dzierzgowska 1975.

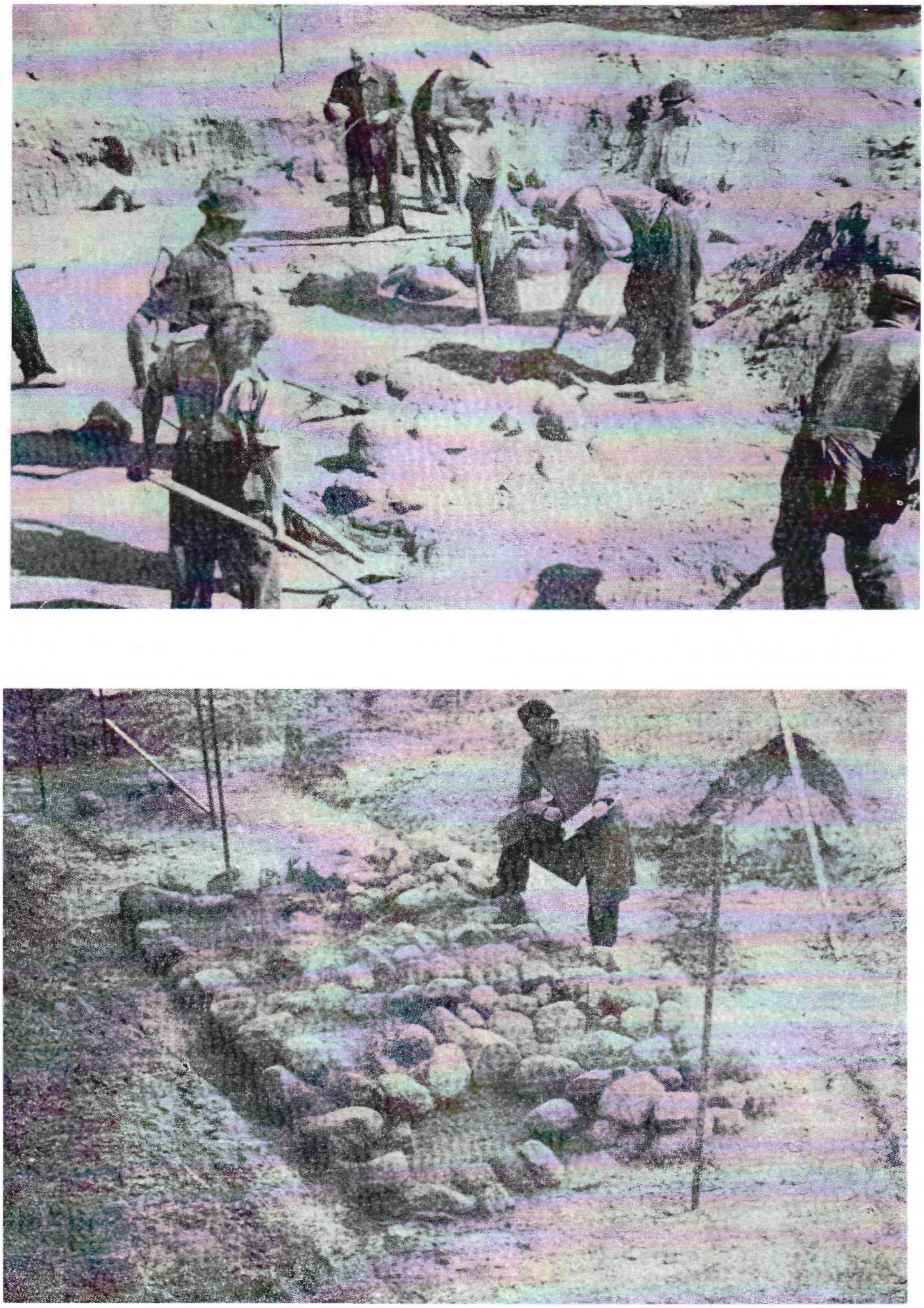

Fig. 2.6. Excavations at Lutomiersk. After Nadolski, Abramowicz, Poklewski 1959, plate XCII.

comprised around 200 graves and were used for longer periods of time. The graves were typically arranged in rows with the dead along the east-west axis, although some exceptions to this rule were also noted.[32] Kufel-Dzierzgowska argued that graves in Central Poland may have been marked on the surface by small mounds, the remains of which usually did not survive. Bodies were typically laid in the grave in a supine position, sometimes in coffins.[33] Occasionally, graves could have stones inside them or forming part of their external structure (e.g. at Lutomiersk). The dead were accompanied by various grave goods, including jewellery, ceramic and wooden vessels, tools and utensils, and occasionally weapons and equestrian equipment (e.g. at Lutomiersk). The majority of graves in Central Poland contained just one individual but several cases of double graves were also discovered.

In addition to the different studies reviewed above, among the most important contributions to Slavic funerary archaeology in Poland are the works of Helena Zoll-Adamikowa. She was a prominent scholar with an impressive list of publications in which she explored various aspects of the Early Middle Ages in Central Europe. In 1966 and 1971, Zoll-Adamikowa published a two-volume monograph on early medieval inhumation cemeteries in Lesser Poland.[34] In 1975 and 1979, she released another crucial work that embraced the complete corpus of evidence for cremation burials in early medieval Poland.[35] All of her studies are characterised by a very meticulous and critical approach to archaeological sources. Some of her interpretations are based on a combination of archaeological and ethnographic materials, often with admirable source-critical attention. We shall discuss aspects of her work in more detail in Chapter 3, especially with regard to her interpretation of atypical or so-called anti-vampire burials.

The studies of the above-mentioned scholars like Władysław Łęga, Zdzisław Rajewski, Maria Miśkiewicz, Lechosław Rauhut, Krzysztof Wachowski, Anna Kufel-Dzierzgowska and Helena Zoll-Adamikowa are now regarded as classic works in the field of early medieval funerary archaeology in Poland. They all form important cornerstones of ongoing research into different aspects of death and dying between the tenth and thirteenth centuries, but in the light of new discoveries some of their interpretations have become outdated and require revision.

Since the 1970s, numerous cemetery reports and other specialist studies of funerary practices in early medieval Poland have been released. It is impossible to list and discuss them all here, but it is worth mentioning a number of important analytical works, overviews, and edited volumes, such as those recently published by Marian Rębkowski,[36] Andrzej Buko,[37] Sylwia Cygan, Marcin Glinianowicz, Piotr Kotowicz,[38] Michał Dzik[39] and others. Valuable studies of funerary practices in early medieval Poland are also regularly published in the series entitled *Funeralia Lednickie*, which contains papers delivered by Polish and international scholars during annual conferences on funerary archaeology organised in Lednica in Greater Poland.[40] The *International Interdisciplinary Meetings 'Motifs through the Ages'* organised at the West Cassubian Museum in Bytów, Poland are some of the latest initiatives in the field of archaeology of death in Poland. So far, two volumes based on their proceedings have been published, the first concerning the motif of the head in past societies and the second focusing on grave reopening.[41]

Over the last twenty years, many new cemeteries have been found and a range of re-evaluations of older discoveries have been published.[42] However, we are still lacking a thorough and up-to-date overview of early medieval funerary practices in Poland. Ideally, such a synthesis should engage with the available material in a modern way, especially by incorporating recent advancements in archaeological theory and the natural sciences. The present book does not aspire to fill this gap, but in the sections below I will present and discuss some new ways of interpreting funerary materials. I will seek to demonstrate that an interdisciplinary approach to these sources can provide valuable hints and ideas regarding Slavic beliefs about death and afterlife.

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[32] Kufel-Dzierzgowska 1975, p. 375.

[33] Kufel-Dzierzgowska 1975, p. 375.

[34] Zoll-Adamikowa 1966; 1971.

[35] Zoll-Adamikowa 1975; 1979.

[36] Rębkowski 2007, pp. 89–161.

[37] Buko 2011, pp. 377–413.

[38] Cygan, Glinianowicz, Kotowicz 2011.

[39] Dzik 2015a; 2015b.

[40] See, for example, the latest volumes in the series, which explore the important issues of ethnicity and identity with regard to funerary archaeology – Dzieduszycki, Wrzesiński 2011; 2012; 2014.

[41] Gardeła, Kajkowski 2013b; 2015b.

[42] See, for example, Kurasiński, Skóra 2012; 2016; Buko 2015; Janowski 2015; Błaszczyk, Stępniewska 2016, with further references.

The performance and meaning of Slavic funerals

With some exceptions, the vast majority of both recent and past work on early medieval graves in Poland has focused on the empirical presentation of archaeological data as well as its typological and chronological classification.[43] As we have seen above, publications from the remit of funerary archaeology usually include details regarding the spatial arrangement of cemeteries, the location of particular graves, and information about their external as well as internal structures and contents. Despite significant advancements in archaeological theory in Western and Northern Europe, in Polish scholarship there is still a prevailing tendency to regard graves and their furnishings in a very simplistic way as 'mirrors of life' – directly reflecting the status and profession which the deceased had in life.[44] Graves with weapons or equestrian equipment are frequently regarded as belonging to 'warriors' or 'horse riders', and lavishly equipped female graves are sometimes seen as those of 'princesses'.[45] Moreover, when osteological analyses are unavailable or impossible to perform due to poor preservation or the complete lack of skeletal material, the sex (and sometimes even the age) of the deceased tends to be inferred on the basis of the objects that accompany them – weapons are seen as indicators of men and jewellery of women.[46] These traditional ways of approaching, analysing and presenting funerary evidence have largely overshadowed other important aspects associated with past burials, especially those related to time, motion, space, symbolism and memory. New studies, however, are gradually trying to change this.[47]

Post-processual approaches to early medieval cemeteries and graves in Poland have only recently started to be applied on a wider scale, but these advancements are still at a nascent stage.[48] Despite the fact that early medieval burial practices in Poland have been debated in the academic literature for over a century, there has been surprisingly little discussion on how funerals were planned, orchestrated and performed, and about the meanings of the different acts that took place during these events.[49] This section will attempt to shed new light on these notions by referring to selected archaeological evidence from cremation and inhumation cemeteries dating between the ninth and thirteenth centuries in Poland. The different stages of mortuary practices examined below can be regarded, in both a practical and metaphorical sense, as rites of passage – integral elements of what may be seen as 'the Slavic journey to the Otherworld'.

The moment of death

The early medieval Slavs could meet their death in various circumstances. They could pass away due to old age, illness, unfortunate accidents or battle wounds. Most people probably died at home, but death could also come in the open air, for example during a long journey or while working in the field or forest. In general, osteological evidence from early medieval cemeteries in Poland implies that the average life expectancy in this part of Europe ranged between ca. 30–40 years, so by today's standards people passed away relatively young.[50]

As will be shown in the following chapters of this book, some people may have died a 'bad death'[51] as a result of suicide, murder, execution or other unusual events (e.g. drowning, fire etc.). These exceptional circumstances could potentially influence the treatment of their bodies at the funeral, and could sometimes also affect certain acts (often of violent nature) conducted after the burial. Archaeological evidence from early medieval Poland clearly demonstrates the existence of a range of 'special' funerary rites, which, among other things, were intended to prevent the dead from returning to the world of the living. In some cases, the fear of revenants rising from their graves to sow terror may be reflected, for example, in the act of burying the dead in a prone position (i.e. face down), or of placing large stones directly on the cadavers. These themes will be explored in further detail in the following chapters of this book. In order to set them against a wider background of more normative funerary behaviour, we shall now focus our attention on graves of people who – it seems – were not feared of becoming dangerous dead and who were buried without special precautions intended to practically and symbolically hold them in their graves.

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[43] See valuable critique in Skrzyńska 2005.

[44] See critique in Gardeła 2016a.

[45] E.g. Kamińska 1956, pp. 100–101. See discussion and critique in Janowski, Kurasiński 2008, pp. 61, 66, 68; Skrzyńska 2005; Sikora 2012b; 2014; Gardeła 2016a.

[46] On the dangers of such uncritical approaches, see Skrzyńska 2005.

[47] E.g. Kurasiński 2002; 2004a; 2004b; 2005; 2008; 2009; 2015a; 2015b; Kajkowski 2013; 2014a; 2014b; 2015a; 2015b; 2016a; 2016b; Kajkowski, Szczepanik 2013; 2014; Szczepanik 2010; Gardeła 2016a; Wawrzeniuk 2016.

[48] See, for example, the important recent works of Sikora 2012a; 2012b; 2013a; 2013b; 2013c; 2014.

[49] Some ideas on these notions are provided in the work of Miśkiewicz 1969. Zoll-Adamikowa 1975, pp. 282-286, in her study of cremation graves, includes a chapter devoted to Latin and Arabic accounts of Slavic funerals. See also Gardeła 2016a, where the process of constructing early medieval chamber graves is explored in detail.

[50] Kozłowski 2008, pp. 97–100.

[51] The meaning of the concept of 'bad death' has been discussed in Chapter 1. For general remarks on 'bad death' see, for example, Lecouteux 2010, pp. 25–27, 31, 127.

Preparing the body for burial

There is not much we can infer from Polish archaeological or textual evidence regarding the way in which the early medieval Slavs prepared the bodies of their dead for burial. Nevertheless, some hints can potentially be found in ethnographic accounts, usually dating from the nineteenth and twentieth century. These sources often mention that, in the case of inhumation burials, initial preparation for burial involved washing the body of the deceased.[52] This practice was not only triggered by hygienic concerns, but seems to have had some symbolic undertones as well. The special meaning of washing the corpse is clearly reflected in the subsequent act of pouring the dirty water outside the house.[53] We may assume that, because the water was in direct contact with the dead, keeping it in the house (or pouring it there) was thought to encourage them to return to the world of the living. Therefore, disposing of it outside the threshold separated the dead from the living in both a symbolic and practical way. It is noteworthy that in past societies the threshold was often conceptualised as a border between the 'inside' and 'outside' worlds (*orbis interior* and *orbis exterior*).[54] According to some Slavic ethnographic accounts, however, water which had been used to wash the dead was believed to possess more positive, even apotropaic, qualities.[55]

Ethnographic sources also mention that people responsible for washing the deceased would sometimes talk to them in kind words during the process.[56] It was believed that this would make the body and its limbs 'softer' and easier to position in the desired way in the coffin or grave. In addition to washing the body, it is possible that the preparation of the cadaver also involved combing and arranging the hair, as well as dressing the body in special clothes, perhaps made specifically for the funeral.[57] In mortuary contexts, toilet implements (e.g. bone and antler combs and other tools) seem to have been endowed with special meanings among various early medieval societies, especially in Anglo-Saxon England.[58] In the case of Poland, however, antler or bone combs (or their fragments) are rarely found in cremation graves (one possible example is known from mound I at Kęsocha in Masovia), and are also very uncommon in inhumations.[59] This may imply either that they were seldom buried with the dead, or that they simply did not survive in the archaeological record. It is worth noting, however, that some inhumation graves discovered in Pomerania contained needles and other implements for textile production,[60] but we do not know for certain if these items were employed in the process of preparing clothes for the dead or whether they had some other meaning. Some hints may be found in ethnographic materials; for example, Joanna Wawrzeniuk mentions the custom of placing a needle in the coffin that was used in the process of preparing clothes for the dead.[61]

Transporting the body

Extant textual sources concerning early medieval Poland lack information about the procedure of transporting bodies of the dead to the place of burial. Nevertheless, based on comparative evidence and much later ethnographic materials, we can guess that the process of moving the cadaver from the house, or some other

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[52] See, for example, Lach 2000, pp. 90–91; Nienałtowski 2007; on the role of water in mortuary practices, see also Janowski, Kurasiński 2008, p. 71; Kajkowski 2016b.

[53] Bylina 1992, p. 12.

[54] On the meaning of thresholds, especially in Viking Age Scandinavia but also elsewhere in Europe, see the recent work of Eriksen 2015.

[55] Bazińska 1967, p. 152.

[56] Lach 2000, pp. 90–91.

[57] The preparation of clothing specifically for burial is mentioned in the tenth-century account of Ibn Fadlān, who describes a funeral of a Rus noble at the Volga. For further details, see Montgomery 2000.

[58] On combs in Anglo-Saxon graves see, for example, Lucy 2000, pp. 60–61; Williams 2003; 2015.

[59] Zoll-Adamikowa 1975, pp. 100–102.

[60] Malinowska-Łazarczyk 1982, p. 115.

[61] Wawrzeniuk 2016, pp. 200–201.

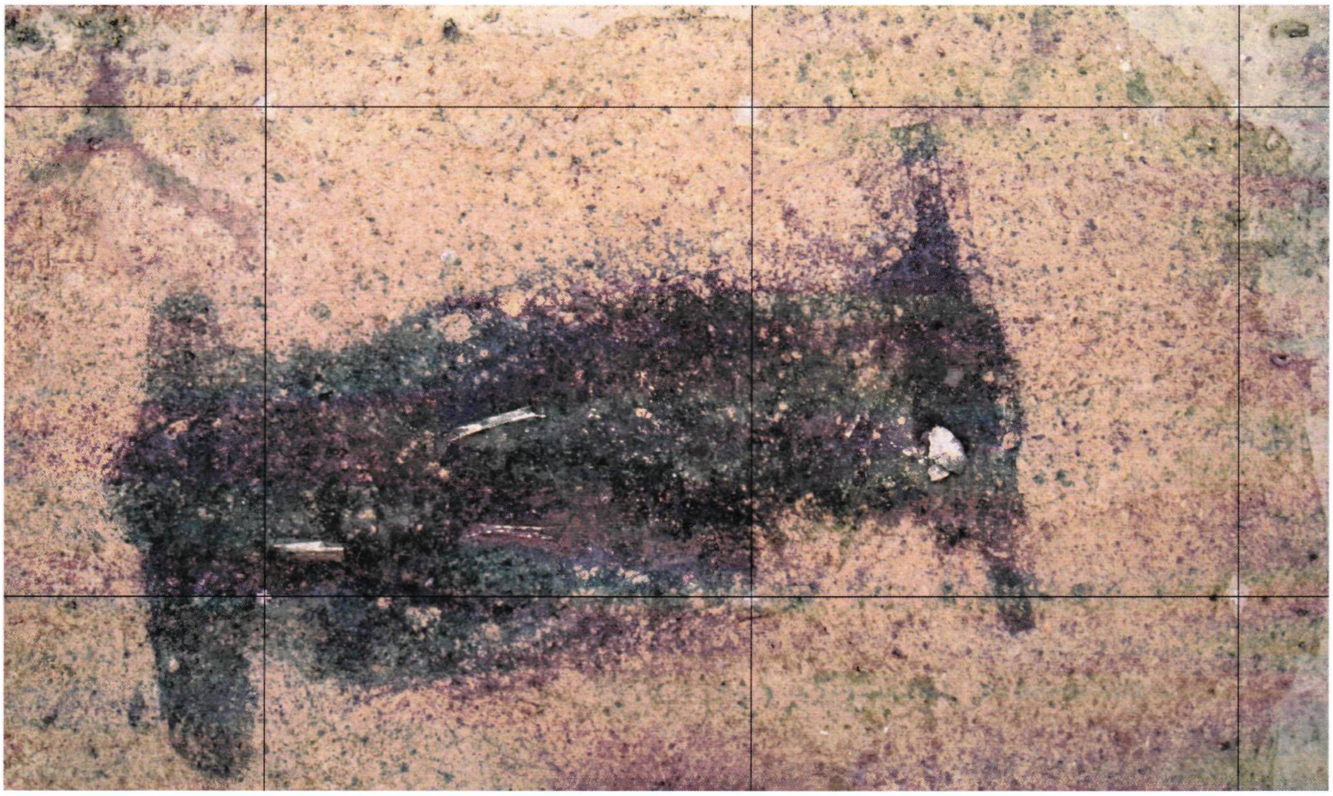

Fig. 2.7. Inhumation grave from Ostrowite with clearly visible traces of biers. Photo by Jerzy Sikora. Used by kind permission.

place where it was kept before the burial, involved a special funerary procession, perhaps accompanied by music or dancing. Whether the bodies were carried on wooden biers or in coffins, or transported with the help of various vehicles (carts, wagons, sledges or even dugout boats or ships), is often difficult to determine. However, as we shall see below, a careful analysis of archaeological remains may provide some hints.

Biers

Some inhumation graves discovered in Poland contain traces of wooden biers that survived in the form of decayed wood lying beneath the skeletal remains. In 2013, I encountered remains like this during excavations in an early medieval cemetery at Ostrowite in Pomerania,[62] where, in one grave, a bier made out of wooden planks of varying length and width was clearly visible in the form of dark stains in the soil (**Fig. 2.7**). Beneath the skeleton, at the head and foot end of the grave pit, there were also traces of transverse planks or logs, which probably enabled the mourners to carry the bier with the body to the cemetery. It seems that four people were required to transport the deceased on biers of this kind.

Traces of such devices for transporting the dead are rarely observed (or recorded) in early medieval cemeteries in Poland,[63] but given the considerable number of graves without coffins or any other portable 'containers' for the body, we can assume that carrying the dead to the graveside on biers was a common practice.

Coffins

Inhumations in coffins begin to appear in Poland in the late tenth century.[64] The spread of this custom may have been partly influenced by the ongoing processes of Christianisation,[65] but the transformation of religious belief does not seem to be the only reason why people

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[62] The excavations at Ostrowite are directed by Dr Jerzy Sikora from the Institute of Archaeology at the University of Łódź. I wish to express my warmest thanks to Dr Sikora for giving me the opportunity to take part in the 2013 fieldwork campaign.

[63] Other examples are known from the early medieval cemetery at Poznań-Śródka and Pyzdry – see Pawlak 1995, p. 116; Pawlak, Pawlak 2015, pp. 56–57; Jagielska 2010, p. 133 for further details.

[64] For examples of burials in coffins in early medieval Poland, see Kufel-Dzierzgowska 1975, pp. 375–376; Pawlak, Pawlak 2015, pp. 49–86; Sawicki 2015 with references.

[65] For a through discussion of changes in funerary practices in Poland and the influence Christianity had upon them, see the important work of Rębkowski 2007, pp. 89–161.

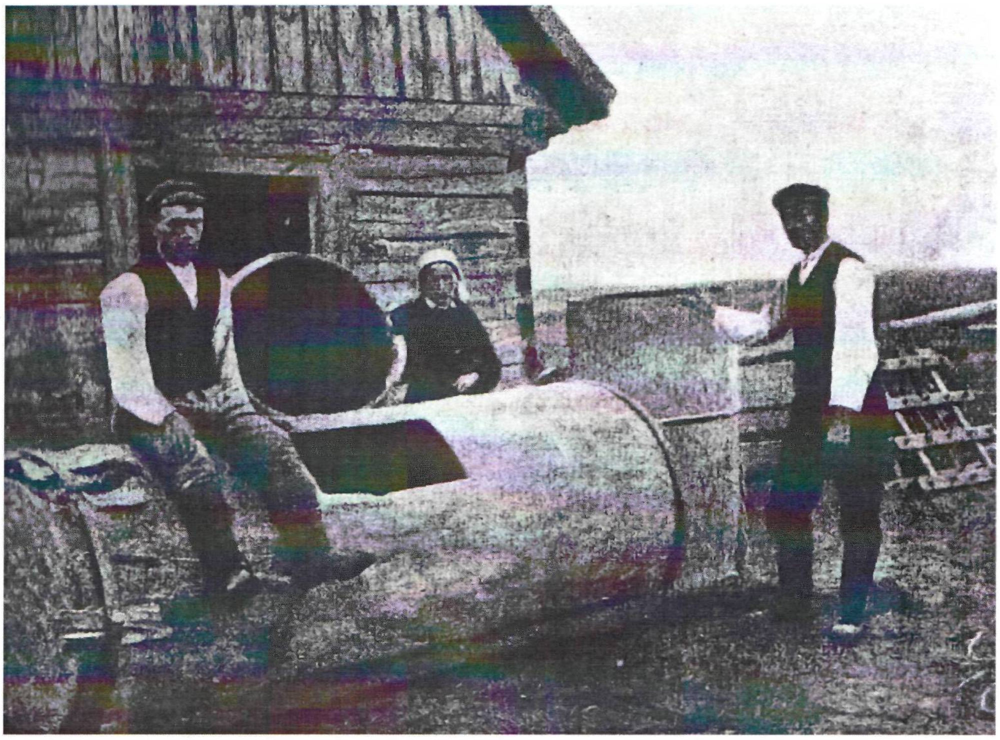

Fig. 2.8. Log of wood used for storing grain. After Moszyński 1929, plate XI-2.

started to use coffins. First and foremost, coffins provide a very effective way of concealing the body. It is possible that in some cases the use of a coffin was advised, not because of the religious beliefs of the deceased or the mourners, but due to the visually unpleasant appearance of the corpse. However, the use of coffins may also have resulted from other circumstances, such as the necessity to transport the cadaver over a long distance. In all probability, the bodies were placed in coffins after they had been washed and dressed and then carried or transported to the place of burial on a wagon, sledge or boat. It is often impossible to determine whether the coffins already had permanent lids while they were taken to the cemetery, or whether their final sealing occurred at the graveside, thereby enabling the mourners to see the dead one last time. It is noteworthy that an open coffin would have allowed the participants of the funeral to deposit various objects inside it, at the same time providing an opportunity to manifest wealth, prestige and status.[66] Interestingly, there are also variants of coffin burials without lids, and these perhaps were intended to display the corpses during the funeral for as long as possible.

In a recent study, Aleksander Limisiewicz has put forward an interesting hypothesis that some of the wood remains identified in graves and previously interpreted as decayed remains of coffins could in fact have been traces of hollowed out wooden logs into which the cadavers were placed.[67] Interestingly, wooden logs – known in Polish as *kłody* (singular *kłoda*) – were also used as containers for grain in the early modern times (**Fig. 2.8**). Given this, Limisiewicz hypothesizes that burying the dead in wooden logs (perhaps even those that had been previously used as containers for grain) may have carried important symbolic undertones, since it equates the dead with grain, evoking ideas of (re)birth and hopes for an afterlife.

Vehicles

Depending on the circumstances, weather conditions, and/or local customs, some of the dead could be transported to the cemetery with the help of various vehicles, such as carts, wagons, sledges[68] or boats.[69] It is often the case that cremation cemeteries in Poland are separated from settlements by rivers. To cross the river, one would have to walk over a bridge. However, if a bridge was lacking, the only way to get to the cemetery would have been by boat. The act of crossing the river, as part of a funerary procession, could have been conceptualised as part of the journey to the otherworld. Indeed, as we shall see below, in some Slavic beliefs rivers separated the land of the living from the land of the dead.[70]

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[66] On related issues of display and commemoration at the graveside, see especially the work of Williams 2006.

[67] Limisiewicz 2016.

[68] On Eastern Slavic burials in sledges, see Kollinger 2016.

[69] On Slavic burials in boats, see an excellent study by Kajkowski 2016b.

After preparing and transporting the body to the place of burial, the next stage of funerary procedures required the selection of a suitable method for disposing of the cadaver. Until the mid tenth century, the dominant way of dealing with the dead in Poland involved cremation, a practice which leads to the complete destruction of the soft tissues and reduction of the bones to ash. Inhumation, a custom which involves burying the dead unburnt, began to be performed among the Slavs in Poland from the late tenth century onwards. Both of these distinctive forms of burial had a plethora of forms and were endowed with various intricate meanings. We shall briefly consider their most important features in turn.

Cremating the body

Cremation graves constitute the oldest traces of Slavic funerary practices in Poland. Reconstructing the processes that led to their creation poses a lot of difficulties; many details of these complex procedures are lost to us today. Nevertheless, we may infer from archaeological remains and comparative evidence that the bodies of the dead were placed on wooden pyres in the company of various objects, and sometimes other humans and/or animals as well.[71] When the pyre was lit, the flames would probably have blazed several meters high into the sky. The memorable atmosphere of cremation funerals was further enhanced by the dramatic sounds of cracking wood and sizzling flesh. The process of reducing the bodies and the goods that accompanied them to ashes could take up to several hours (**Fig. 2.9**).[72]

Some Christian and Arabic authors describe what allegedly took place during cremation funerals among the Slavs, and their accounts contain rather dramatic details. Several of these medieval sources mention that Slavic wives were particularly devout and when their husbands died, would scar their faces or even commit suicide to be able to join their beloved ones on the funeral pyre.[73] As Thietmar of Merseburg writes (Book 8, Chapter 3):

> In the days of his father [Thietmar refers to Mieszko I, father of Bolesław the Brave], when he still embraced heathenism, every woman followed her husband on to the funeral pyre, after first being decapitated.[74]

It is difficult to verify the authenticity of these descriptions. Because many of them were written down by foreigners with a limited understanding of Slavic worldviews, it is possible that they represent merely a distorted vision of funerary customs which had no reflection in reality.

Archaeological discoveries demonstrate that early medieval cremation graves in Poland had a wide variety of forms.[75] Their external structures usually had the appearance of earthen mounds, sometimes with additional stones inside or outside.[76] The mounds were often round or oval, but square- or rectangular-shaped examples have also been noted.[77] Depending on the region and local customs, the height of mounds with cremation graves could range from around 30cm to several metres. Among the highest mounds with cremated remains in Poland is the so-called Krakus Mound (Polish *Kopiec Krakusa*) in Kraków, but this is very exceptional (**Fig. 2.10** and **Fig. 2.11**). Generally speaking, most cremation graves had relatively small mounds, which makes it difficult to distinguish them in the landscape today.

Mounds were occasionally surrounded with fences made out of wooden posts, as in the case of some cremation graves from the cemetery at Wolin Młynówka and Puszcza Białowieska. Józef Kostrzewski speculated that these fences may have created a kind of 'magic border' which guarded the grave against the influence of evil powers.[78] While there are no textual or other sources to support Kostrzewski's hypothesis, it is quite

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[70] Kotowicz 2007.

[71] On animal remains in Slavic cremation graves, see Kostrzewski 1960, pp. 18–19.

[72] For interdisciplinary and cross-cultural studies of cremation, see Thompson 2015.

[73] Kostrzewski 1960, p. 5. A complete list of these accounts is provided by Zoll-Adamikowa 1975, pp. 282–286. See also Gardeła, Kajkowski 2014; Wawrzeniuk 2016, pp. 176–177.

[74] Thietmar of Merseburg, *Chronicon*, Book 8, Chapter 3; Translation after Warner 2001, p. 362.

[75] For major overviews of Western Slavic cremation graves, see Kostrzewski 1960; Zoll-Adamikowa 1975; 1979.

[76] Kostrzewski 1960, p. 12.

[77] Kostrzewski 1960, p. 12.

[78] Kostrzewski 1960, p. 13: 'Opłotowanie to miało może charakter kręgu magicznego, broniącego dostępu złym mocom w czasie obrzędu pogrzebowego, gdyby bowiem miało ono zastąpić ogrodzenie kamienne, to nie zostałoby spalone' / 'Perhaps the fence played the role of a magic circle which protected against the influence of evil powers during the funeral, because if it were

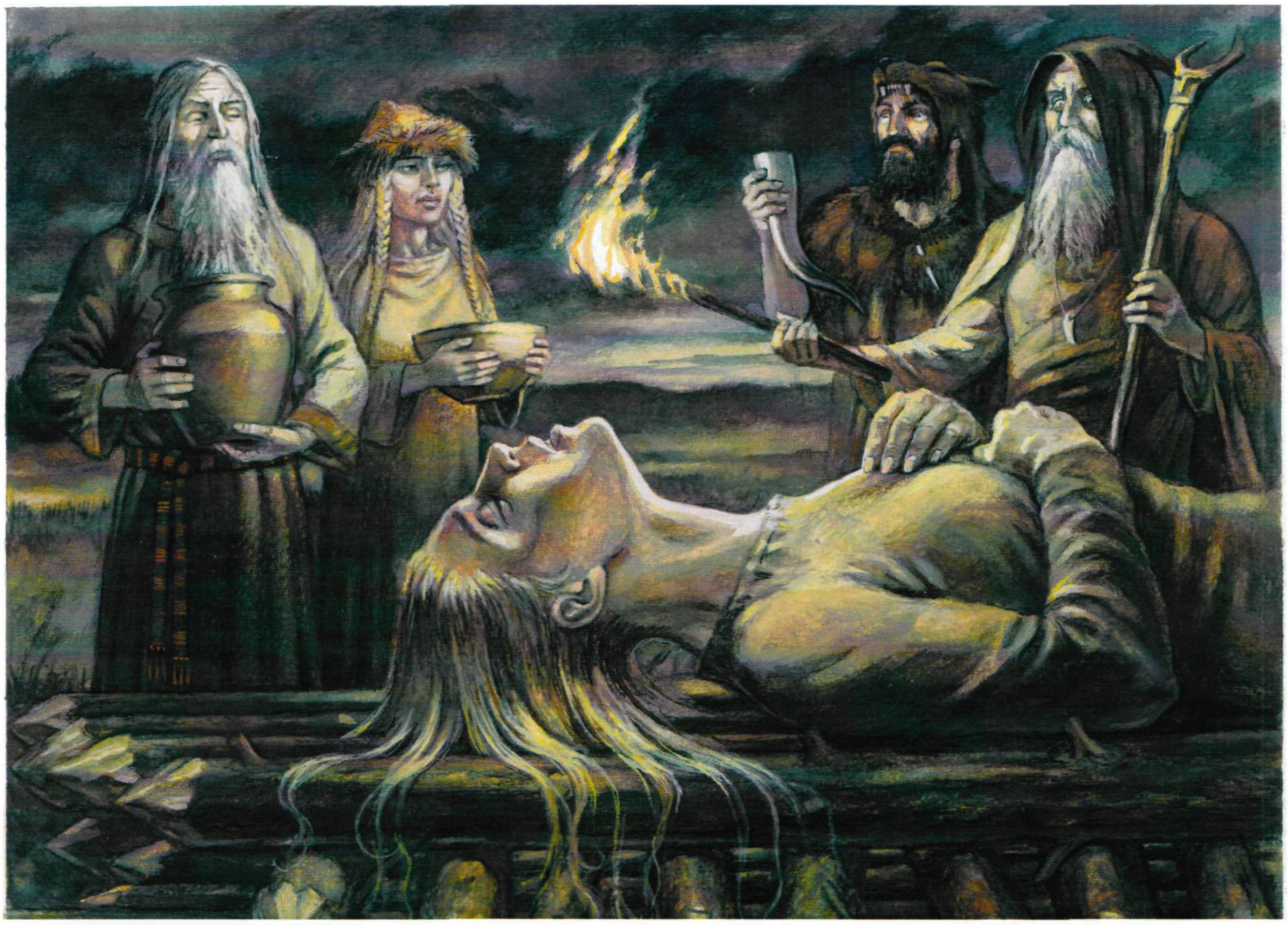

Fig. 2.9. Artistic reconstruction of a Slavic cremation burial. Illustration by Mirosław Kuźma. Copyright by Leszek Gardeła and Mirosław Kuźma

possible that fences served the very practical purpose of protecting the graves and their contents from the undesirable intrusions of robbers and animals. Some mounds were also encircled by ditches, but these were probably created simply as a result of digging the soil used for their construction. It is also possible that they were intended as drainage ditches.[79]

Based on excavation results, it appears that some mounds could be raised directly above the place where the act of cremation was conducted, while in other instances the burnt human remains could be brought to their final burial site from elsewhere. Thick layers of charred wood discovered at the base of the mound could be a strong indication that the mound was raised directly over a pyre, which later burned down. In some instances, however, such layers could merely indicate that fire was used to remove grass or bushes from the place chosen for the grave. Some scholars have also argued that the act of burning grass or bushes had ritual overtones and was intended to symbolically 'purify' it, but this idea finds no support in the extant textual sources pertaining to the Slavic world.[80]

The internal structures of cremation graves in the area of Poland are quite diverse. Several variants can be distinguished. Most of them contain a layer of cremated bones, fragments of charred wood and occasionally some modest grave goods. Among the predominant types of objects buried with the dead were clay vessels, either whole or fragmented. These vessels may have served the role of containers for food or drink, and were probably placed on the funeral pyre alongside the deceased. It is also possible, however, that some fragmented clay vessels found in cemeteries, belonged to the mourners who ate and drank from them during and/or after the funeral and then deliberately destroyed them, perhaps with ritual intent.

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to substitute for a fence made of stone, it would not be burnt' (Translation by Leszek Gardeła).

[79] For other interpretations of ditches around mounds with cremation graves, see Wawrzeniuk 2016, p. 178.

[80] See discussion in Kostrzewski 1960, p. 14.

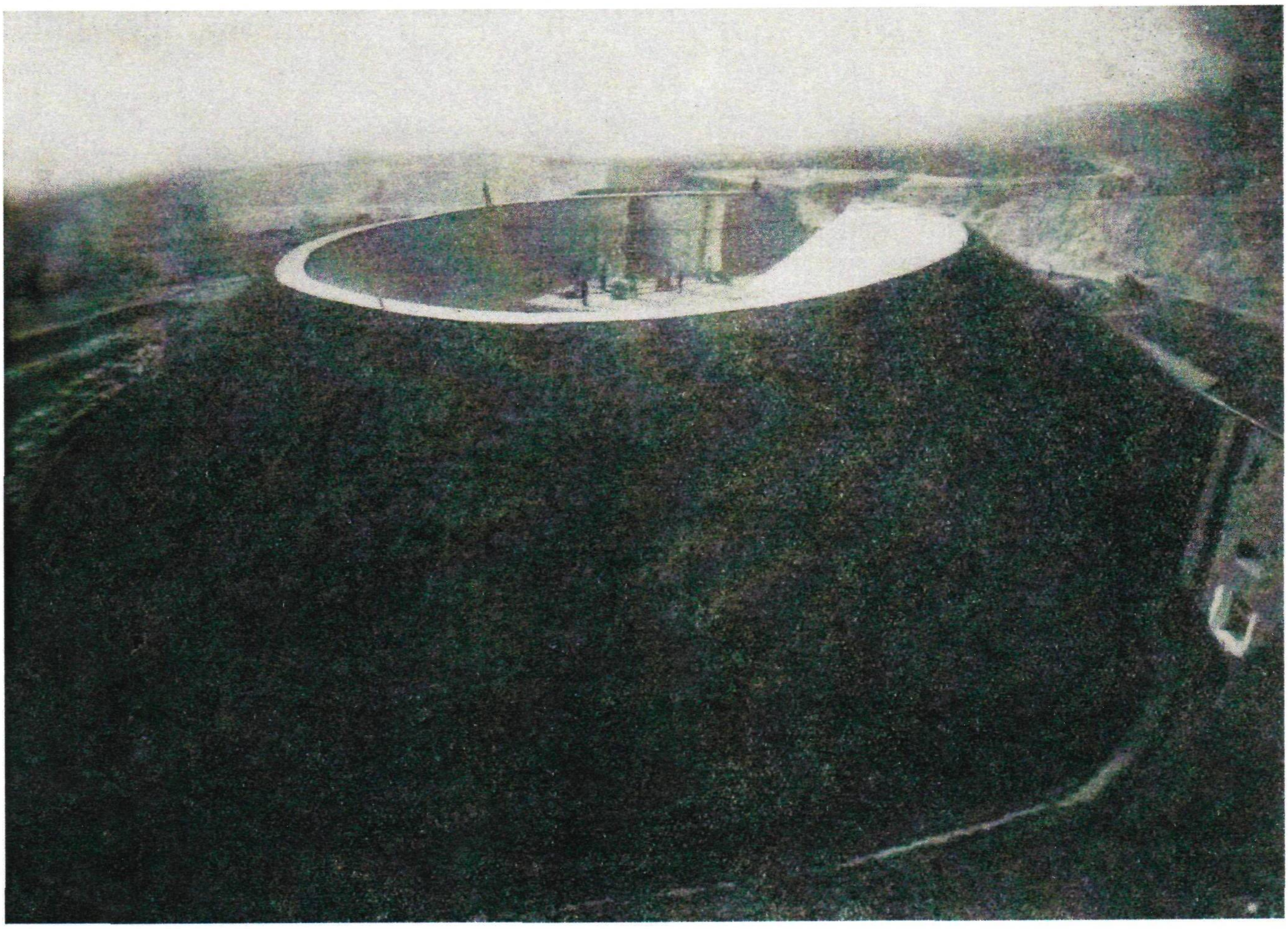

Fig. 2.10. The Krakus Mound in Kraków upon excavation. After Hensel 1960, p. 45.

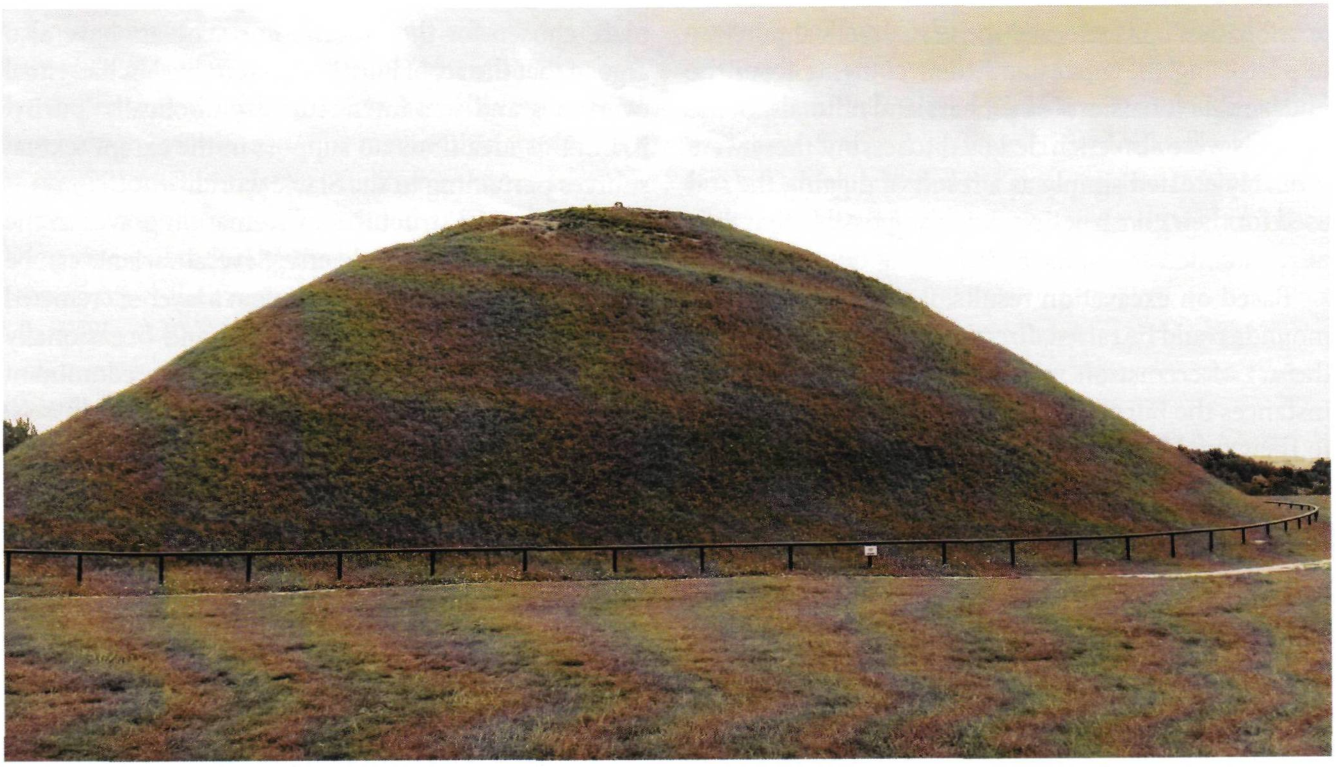

Fig. 2.11. Modern view of the Krakus Mound. Photo by Leszek Gardeła.

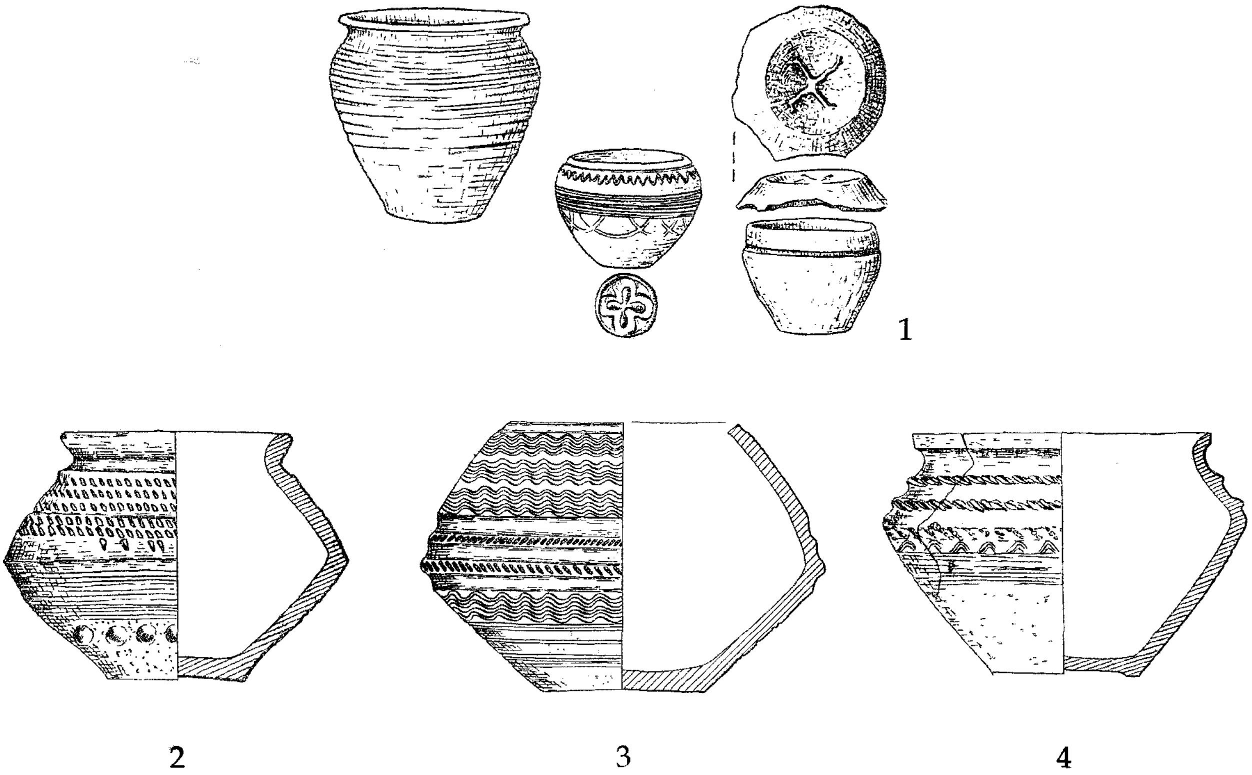

Fig. 2.12. Funerary urns from Orzeszkowo and Wolin Młynówka. 1 – Urns from mounds I and III from Orzeszkowo. Reproduced after Zoll-Adamikowa 1975, p. 185. 2 – Urns from graves 3/31, 5/99 and 9/173 from Wolin Młynówka. Reproduced after Wojtasik 1968, pp. 260–261.

Speaking of clay vessels, it is worth pointing out that, in some instances, they also served the role of containers for cremated bones (**Fig. 2.12**). As such, they could be buried inside mounds or even placed on top of them, sometimes on wooden posts.[81] On occasion, vessels were placed inside the mound in special constructions made out of stones or wood (the latter resembled chests or small chambers). It is important to emphasise that the vessels used as containers for human remains did not differ from the tableware that was used by the Slavs on an everyday basis. However, some vessels with cremated bones were additionally covered with clay or stone lids, perhaps intended to provide special protection for their contents.[82]

Archaeological excavations and anthropological analyses have shown that most mounds with cremation graves contained the remains of single individuals. This stands in stark contrast to the aforementioned textual accounts which describe Slavic women allegedly committing suicide at the graveside and willingly joining their deceased husbands on the funeral pyre. Although cases in which several individuals were buried in one mound have been discovered (for example in the cemeteries at Wolin and Strzykocin), this seems to have been a rather rare occurrence. Such graves show no traces of violent acts or human sacrifice.[83]

Finally, it is interesting to note that some cremation graves discovered in Poland contained objects of clearly foreign provenance, such as Scandinavian-style female jewellery (e.g. oval and trefoil brooches), gaming pieces and boat rivets.[84] This is clear evidence that some eighth- and ninth-century cemeteries located along the southern coast of the Baltic (for example at Elbląg, Świelubie and Wolin) had a multicultural character and served as places of burial for both a local and a foreign population.

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[81] Kostrzewski 1960, p. 15.

[82] Kostrzewski 1960, p. 17.

[83] Kostrzewski 1960, pp. 16–17; for a wider debate on the notion of human sacrifice at Slavic funerals, see Gardeła, Kajkowski 2014.

[84] On burials of Viking Age Scandinavians in the area of Poland, see Kostrzewski 1960, pp. 7–8; Łosiński 1972; 1974; 2003; Jagodziński 2009; Gardeła 2014; 2015c; 2016a.

Inhuming the body

As we have seen in the sections above, archaeological excavations conducted in various early medieval cemeteries in Poland reveal that the dead could be buried in many different ways. This variety may have depended on local customs and beliefs, the availability of necessary building material (e.g. wood or stone), the wealth of those responsible for the funeral, and many other factors. The cremation graves discussed above were a characteristic feature of Slavic cemeteries before the introduction of Christianity. From the mid tenth century onwards, when Christianity was accepted as the official religion of the ruling Piast dynasty and their subjects, a drastic change in funerary practices occurred and inhumation became the dominant way of dealing with the dead. In this section, we shall take a closer look at the various forms of inhumation burials from the period between the late tenth and thirteenth centuries.

In contrast to cremation graves, the external structure of the vast majority of graves in inhumation cemeteries was flat, but some graves were occasionally covered by low mounds.[85] It is possible that mounds were erected over graves of prominent individuals. In particular areas, for example in Central Poland or Masovia, graves were additionally marked with stones on the surface of the cemetery, sometimes in geometrical patterns (usually rectangles).[86] For most inhumation graves, however, it is impossible to identify any clearly discernible external structures – this may not necessarily result from a complete lack of structure in the past, but simply from its later destruction, for example due to intrusive agricultural activity in modern times.[87]

As mentioned earlier, some sites display evidence that the dead were buried on wooden biers (on which they might have actually been carried to the cemetery), or in coffins which were occasionally strengthened or adorned with nails or iron fittings. Recent studies have also revealed examples of chamber graves – underground 'rooms' or 'houses' for the dead, often constructed with the use of wooden planks or beams.[88] Bodies placed within such graves could be laid directly on the ground, on biers or in wooden coffins. Chamber graves certainly represent some of the most complex and time-consuming types of funerary architecture in early medieval Poland. They were probably constructed for people of considerable standing, serving as a reminder of their (or their mourners') wealth, status and perhaps religious belief. A relatively rare but very interesting custom that was practiced in some early medieval cemeteries in Poland involved burying the dead on dugout boats.[89] Boat graves of this type are known predominantly from the area of Pomerania,[90] with occasional examples in Silesia[91] and elsewhere.[92]

Not all early medieval inhumation graves in Poland contained grave goods (or at least we cannot find evidence for them today due to poor preservation), but different variants were sometimes furnished with objects, ranging from everyday utensils and vessels (sometimes containing food and drink) to textiles, jewellery, coins and weapons. As in the case of cremation graves, most of the dead were inhumed singly, but there are also examples of double[93] or even mass inhumation graves. Interestingly, some of the most lavishly equipped graves are those of children.[94] Fragmentary animal remains, probably from food or amulets, are also occasionally found in inhumations, but whole animals are very rarely buried with the dead in early medieval

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[85] Inhumation graves probably covered by mounds have been found, for example, at Ostrowite and Dębina. See Sikora 2016, p. 70 and Kufel-Dzierzgowska 1975, p. 375 for further particulars.

[86] Rauhut 1971a.

[87] Even if mounds are not preserved in the funerary landscape today, in some cases it is possible to argue for the their existence in the past based on careful analyses of the topography of early medieval cemeteries. The possible existence of mounds over certain graves can be implied by the spatial arrangement of other graves or features around them. A good example of an inhumation grave that was probably covered with an earthen mound was discovered in the cemetery at Wolin Młynówka. This grave (217) belonged to a child. When we look at the cemetery plan, we see that within a radius of circa 2 m there were no other graves or features around it. All this is a strong indication that it could have been covered with a mound. For further particulars, see Wojtasik 1968, pp. 208–209.

[88] On chamber graves in early medieval Poland see, for example, Chudziak 2001; 2002; 2003; Janowski 2011a; 2011b; 2013; 2015; Ratajczyk 2013b; Buko 2015; Gardeła 2013a; 2016a; for valuable overviews, see the papers included in Błaszczyk, Stępniewska 2016.

[89] On boat burials in early medieval Poland and Pomerania, see Kajkowski 2016b.

[90] Malinowska-Łazarczyk 1985, p. 86; Pawlak 2013, pp. 216–217; Kajkowski 2016b.

[91] Gardeła 2012a, p. 33 with references.

[92] Pawlak 2013; Gardeła 2014, pp. 35–36.

[93] For a more detailed discussion on double inhumation graves in early medieval Poland, see Gardeła, Kajkowski 2014.

[94] See, for example, Miśkiewicz 1967, pp. 120–121; Kurasiński 2004b; 2009; Gardeła, Duma 2013 with references.

Poland.[95] Separate 'graves' (or deposits) of animals have been found in some early medieval cemeteries, for example in Greater Poland, Kuyavia, and elsewhere, but overall such instances are extremely rare.[96]

In most instances, the manner in which the dead were treated shows that the mourners cared both for the deceased and for the aesthetic display of their bodies during the funeral.[97]

Funerary festivities and the funeral feast

It is difficult to determine the mood of Slavic funerals. We do not know if these were generally sad or merry events. Perhaps even making such a dualistic distinction is inappropriate, as funerals varied from place to place and depended on a broad range of factors. People who gathered at the graveside could have felt angry, guilty, shocked, somber, regretful or even happy. Although these various emotions are often difficult or impossible to distinguish on the basis of the archaeological evidence that we have at hand, we can nevertheless infer from extant textual sources that funerals in some areas involved a range of dramatic performances, in which the mourners would resort to various theatrical techniques. A good, albeit very laconic, example of the theatrical nature of Slavic mortuary practices is provided by Cosmas of Prague, who describes in his *Chronica Boemorum* how the Bohemian Duke Brzetysław II fought against pagan practices in his land. Cosmas says that the Duke banned the organization of funerals in forests or fields, and forbade dancing in masks. He also forbade erecting special road shrines (*scenas*) which were intended as a resting place for souls.[98] Even though we lack hard archaeological evidence to support Cosmas' account, this gives us a valuable hint as to what Slavic mortuary behaviour may have entailed and demonstrates its theatrical character.

It is highly probable that funerals among the Slavs were accompanied or followed by a feast. This is suggested by the discovery of charcoal (suggesting that a fire was burnt close to the grave),[99] pottery shards and loose animal bones in early medieval cemeteries, both in the grave fills and on the surface.[100] A special ritual feast was known among the Slavs as *strawa* (in today's Polish *stypa*). According to some scholars, during this feast the deceased was symbolically fed by the mourners, and in this way shared food with them. However, this information comes from later, non-medieval sources.[101] Unfortunately, based on the available archaeological materials, not much can be said about the nature of these feasts and the kinds of food and drink that their participants consumed.

Interacting with the dead

Interactions between the living and the dead were not limited only to funerary acts. Similar to other societies of the early medieval world (for example the Viking Age Scandinavians),[102] the Slavs commemorated and interacted with their dead in many different ways and on various occasions. Remembering the dead may have involved dramatic performances, dancing, singing and the consumption of food and drink – the discovery of loose pottery shards inside and outside the graves may reflect traces of such practices. In some cases, however, interaction with the dead could take a different form involving physical engagement with the remains through reopening the graves and manipulating bones and objects. The vast array of meanings that the act of reopening graves may have entailed will be discussed in detail in Chapter 7, so these are only mentioned in passing here.

It is worth highlighting that the practice of commemorating the dead is sometimes associated with the widespread concept known as 'ancestor worship'. As I have pointed out in an earlier study, it is essential to acknowledge the distinct difference between mere

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[95] See, for example, Kajkowski, Kuczkowski 2009-2010; Kurasiński, Skóra 2016, pp. 42–43, 88.

[96] On animal graves in early medieval Poland, see Kajkowski 2016a.

[97] One interesting case, which might represent considerable care for the dead, is the discovery of moss under the skull of a young girl from grave 6 in the early medieval cemetery at Grodziec near Będzin. For more details, see Smutek 1952, p. 61.

[98] The Latin version of this account is provided by Zoll-Adamikowa 1975, p. 285: '(...) item sepulturas, quae fiebant in silvis et in campis, atque scenas, quas ex gentili ritu faciebant in biviis et in triviis, quasi ob animarum pausationem, item et iocos profanos, quos super mortuos suos, inanes cientes manes ac induti faciem larvis bachando exercebant (...) exterminavit'.

[99] Fireplaces within the space of the cemetery have been noted, for example, at Wolin Młynówka. See Wojtasik 1968, pp. 217–218.

[100] See, for example, Byrska-Kaszewska 1957, p. 258.

[101] Bylina 1992, p. 10.

[102] For a detailed discussion of ancestor worship in Viking Age Scandinavia, see Gardeła 2016b. See also Sundqvist 2015 for an analysis of relevant textual sources.

'commemoration' and more serious 'worship', the latter implying that the deceased acquire a somewhat 'divine' or 'supernatural' status.[103]

It is difficult to know for certain if the idea of worshipping the dead existed among the early medieval Slavs in Poland, but this possibility cannot be ruled out completely. In pre-Christian times the lives and deeds of rulers or other prominent individuals would often evolve into stories, legends or myths that were told over and over through generations. As a result, in the course of time, some of the dead could even come to be conceptualised as gods or supernatural beings. In contrast to the Old Norse world – where the idea of worshipping the dead is reflected in a range of written sources and archaeological materials[104] – there are no extant accounts about the Slavic dead becoming gods and receiving sacrifices. It is beyond doubt, however, that ancestors were of great importance to the living, and this is reflected in the careful manner in which the dead were prepared for burial and in which the space of cemeteries was arranged. Some hints of ancestor worship can also be seen in the Christian cult of saints and their relics, which started to develop in Poland in the early eleventh century, relatively soon after the conversion. Polish folkloristic sources from the nineteenth and early twentieth century also preserve information about people regularly visiting their deceased relatives in cemeteries and depositing various offerings on their graves. Remarkably, these practices are still continued – 'All Saints' Day' in Poland is one of the most important religious festivities. Each year, on November 1st, people bring flowers and other goods to the graves of their relatives and at night the cemeteries lit up with thousands of candles creating an eerie atmosphere which enhances the belief that the dead are once again among the living (**Fig. 2.13**). Although the Church supports and promotes the celebration of 'All Saints' Day', the strong pre-Christian undertones of many of the rituals that are performed during that time can be noticed immediately.

In the context of this discussion, it might be worth briefly mentioning Andrzej Buko's interpretation of a puzzling deposit discovered at the stronghold at Ryczyn in Lower Silesia.[105] Within a wooden structure in the shape of a boat were layers of animal bones (some of which were preserved in anatomic order) including those of a dog, horse, pig and birds. Buko argues that this deposit could have represented burial gifts intended for the journey to the Otherworld.[106] Regardless of whether this particular interpretation is correct, in light of the sources discussed above, the idea that the Slavs offered gifts to their dead and were concerned for their well-being seems possible.

The meaning of grave goods

In the sections above, I mention that on some occasions the dead buried in early medieval inhumation cemeteries in Poland were provisioned with different types of grave goods, such as jewellery, weapons, clay and wooden vessels (e.g. buckets), but also with various tools and small utensils. The meanings of these grave goods are not easy to unravel today – they may have been prized personal possessions of the deceased or objects belonging to the mourners who placed them in the grave with some special intention in mind. It is clear, however, that the items buried with the dead did not only (or at all) manifest the status, wealth or profession which the deceased (or those who buried them) had in life, but also served as powerful symbols and mnemonic devices.[107] The different types and depositions of these items in the grave may potentially reveal something about the conception of the Otherworld(s) to which the dead were believed to depart, and may also offer hints about the nature of the journey that led there.

Although inhumation graves generally (with some exceptions) begin to appear in Poland along with the official introduction of Christianity in the late tenth century, I would argue that the manner in which the dead were treated over the next two or three hundred years after the conversion was still very strongly influenced by pre-Christian customs and beliefs. It seems that in the turbulent period between the tenth and thirteenth centuries, when the old pagan traditions blended or competed with the official teachings of the Church, the provision of grave goods went through a transitional phase of adapting to the new social and ideological order. Given this, I find it impossible to draw a firm line between the practice of cremation and

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[103] Gardeła 2016b, p. 171.

[104] Sundqvist 2015; Gardeła 2016b.

[105] Buko 2011, pp. 407–409.

[106] Buko 2011, p. 408.

[107] On the mnemonic role of objects and aspects of remembrance and forgetting at early medieval funerals, see Williams 2006.

Fig. 2.13. All Saints' Day in Poland. Photo by Melissa Pelczar. Used by kind permission.

inhumation in Poland, in which the former is classified as strictly pagan and the latter as purely Christian.

A more pronounced orthodoxy or consistency in the treatment of the dead and the performance of funerals might have occurred at cemeteries which were located close to local power centres and churches (so-called 'churchyard cemeteries'). But in the case of burial sites that are more distant from important towns or strongholds, or from developed political and Christian structures (so-called 'non-churchyard cemeteries' or 'rural cemeteries'), it is very likely that funerals were conducted by people who had a limited understanding of Christian religion. Since the network of parishes remained at a nascent stage for a considerably long time, it is possible that many early medieval funerals which took place in the countryside were performed without the presence and orchestration of a priest, or any other official familiar with Christian customs.

In the following sections we shall take a closer look at the different types of grave goods buried with the dead and attempt to unravel their symbolic meanings. Since the cremation graves in Poland were rarely furnished with objects, the discussion will focus predominantly on objects buried with the dead in inhumation graves.

Jewellery and amulets

Jewellery – including various head adornments, rings, bracelets, beads and other items – is common in inhumation graves in early medieval Poland. It is found predominantly in the graves of women and children, although it may be occasionally encountered in the graves of men as well (e.g. especially in the form of finger-rings). Interestingly, it is often the case that the graves with the most lavish jewellery belong to children and especially young girls.

Jewellery played various roles in the lives and worldviews of early medieval Slavs – it represented wealth, status, religion and group affiliation. Some types of jewellery (such as Slavic head adornments in the form of 'temple rings', so called because they were worn at the temples[108]) were so characteristic that they were probably regarded as a distinctive marker of their owners' origin and/or ethnic identity (**Fig. 2.14**). It seems that in the early Middle Ages it would have been unusual, or perhaps even inappropriate, for a non-Slavic woman to wear temple rings. In this context, it is interesting to observe that, in contrast to Viking Age Scandinavia, where most female jewellery (e.g. in the form of different kinds of pendants and oval, round, equal-armed or trefoil brooches) was worn on the chest, in the Slavic lands it was the head that was the most adorned part of the body.[109] This was not merely a cultural difference in the style of dress and its accessories, but probably something that held important symbolic meanings as well. There are hints in extant textual sources that in the Scandinavian world the human soul (or souls) was located in the chest, and that on occasion it could even be sent out on an errand in the form of breath or wind.[110] In the Slavic world, on the other hand, it is the head that seems to have been the residence of the soul. I will return to these ideas and discuss them more thoroughly in Chapter 5.

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[108] On the symbolic meanings of temple rings see, for example, Hensel 1970.

The provision of jewellery in graves may have had various symbolic overtones. On the one hand, it probably allowed the corpse to be displayed in visually attractive way at the funeral. At the same time, it probably also served a mnemonic function by helping the mourners to remember the deceased in the most favourable manner possible, as beautifully dressed, healthy, proud and powerful. On the other hand, some items of jewellery may have been intended as amulets to protect the dead on their way to the other side. It is very difficult to provide any general claims here, however; we must remain open to various interpretational possibilities. The symbolic meanings associated with jewellery in funerary contexts probably varied from one region to another and among different individuals.

It is worth noting that, in addition to jewellery made of ferrous and non-ferrous metals (e.g. silver, gold or copper alloys), some graves also included organic objects that may have served decorative and/or amuletic functions. Among such items scholars often include animal teeth and claws,[111] as well as belemnites or organic amulet-pouches (so-called *kaptorgas*), which were worn suspended around the neck (**Fig. 2.15**).[112] Amulets are generally regarded as objects which protect against misfortune or danger. Perhaps placing them in graves protected the dead on their way to the Otherworld. Alternatively, it is possible that amulets in funerary contexts protected not the dead, but the living from undesired *post-mortem* activity. There are certainly many other possible ways to for interpret the meaning of jewellery in graves.

Weapons

The most common weapon types buried with the dead in the period between the tenth and thirteenth centuries were axes and spears (**Fig. 2.16**).[113] Swords were extremely rare grave goods, and the same could be said about armour such as mail,[114] only small fragments of which are occasionally found.[115] Shields and helmets, although certainly used by the Polish armies in the Early Middle Ages, have never been found (or recorded) in funerary contexts[116] – either because they were not buried with the dead or due to poor preservation of the organic materials out of which they were made. It is worth noting that some graves contain small projectiles, such as arrowheads. Interestingly, these are also encountered in burials of children.[117] In general, weapons are typically found in the graves of men, but in some cases they were also buried with women.[118]

In Polish archaeological publications, weapons are usually seen as indicators of military status: there is a dominant tendency to label weapon graves as those

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[109] On female jewellery in Viking Age Scandinavia see, for example, Rygh 1885; Petersen 1928; 1955.

[110] See, for example, Heide 2006a; 2006b; 2006c.

[111] For examples of alleged amulets made of bone, see Jażdżewski 1955, pp. 170, 173–174, 177, 183, 195, 210; Łosiński 1958, pp. 266–267, 274.

[112] For an overview of different types of amulets in early medieval Poland, see Jaguś 2003. For a more recent and critical discussion, see Gardeła 2014, pp. 125–127; Wawrzeniuk 2016, pp. 213–215.

[113] For detailed overviews of early medieval weapons and warfare in Poland, see Nadolski 1954; 1956; Głosek, Nadolski 1970; Głosek 1984.

[114] Remains of possible mail were found in grave 207 in the cemetery at Wolin Młynówka. See Wojtasik 1968, p. 200 for further details.

[115] Graves with different types of weapons are particularly common in the area of Masovia and Podlachia. For a discussion of these finds, see Rauhut 1971a. However, weapons in funerary contexts are also known from other parts of Poland including, among others, Silesia, Greater Poland and Central Poland. They are also occasionally found in early medieval burials in Pomerania.

[116] On the use of shields among the Slavs and their potential remains in funerary contexts, see Rudziński 2009; Wrzesiński 2007.

[117] Kurasiński 2004b.

[118] A woman buried in the cemetery at Lutomiersk was accompanied by a spear – see Kufel-Dzierzgowska 1975, p. 380.

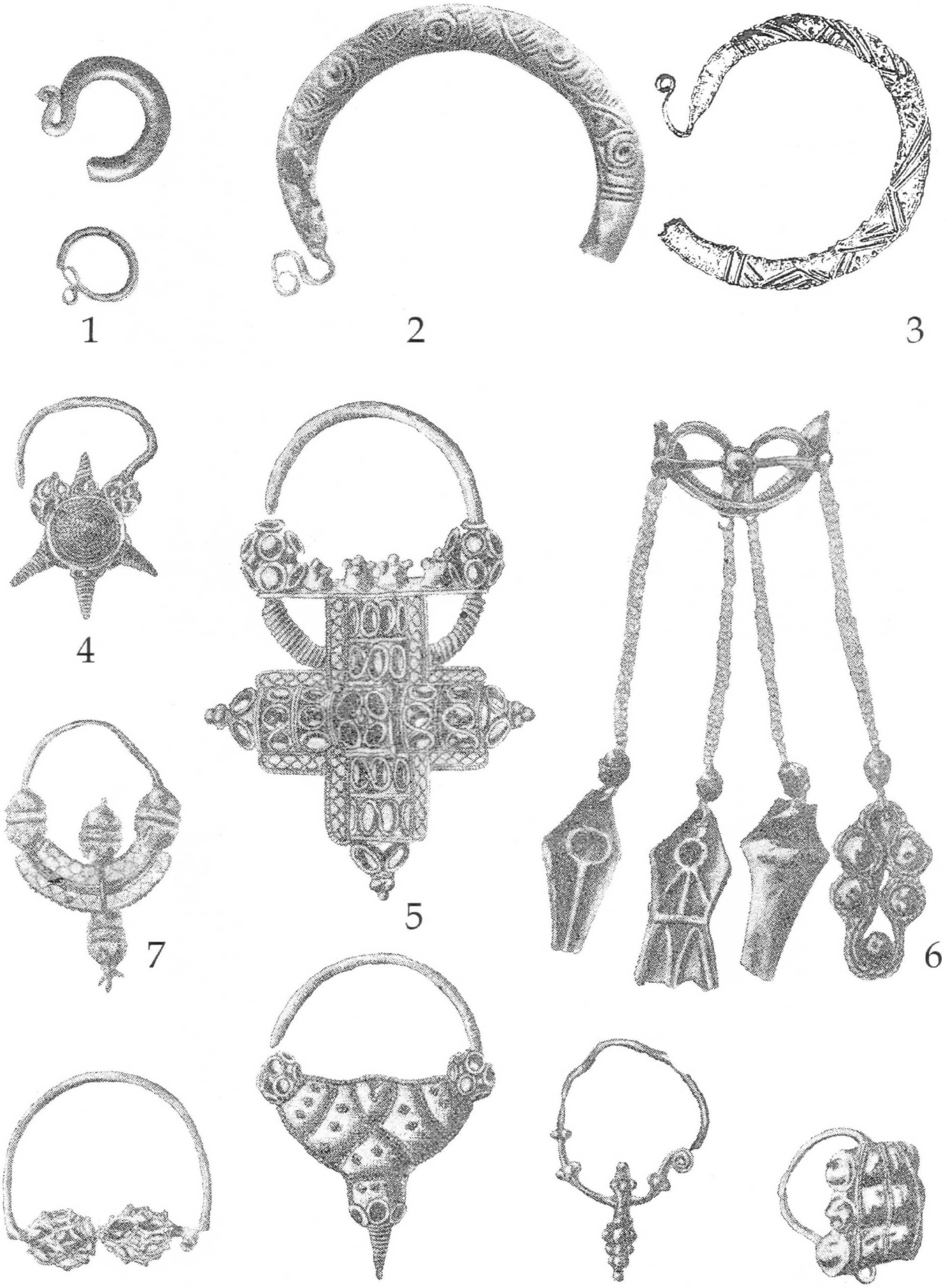
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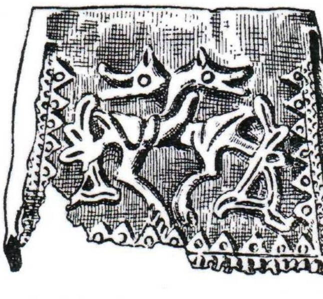
Fig. 2.14. Selection of different types of Slavic temple rings. After Kostrzewski 1962, p. 157. Not to scale.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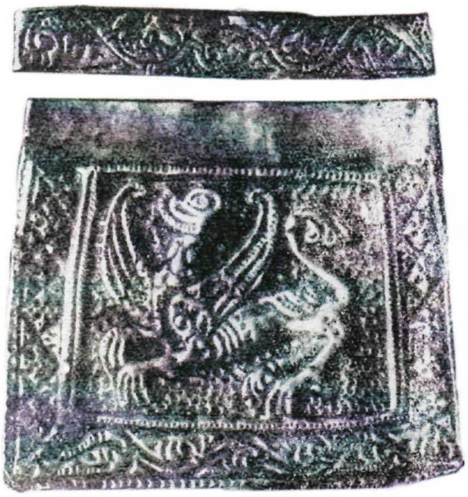
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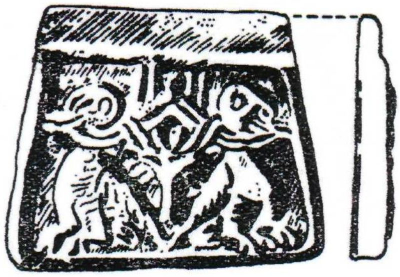
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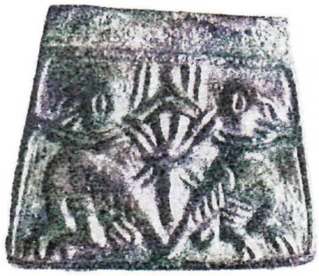
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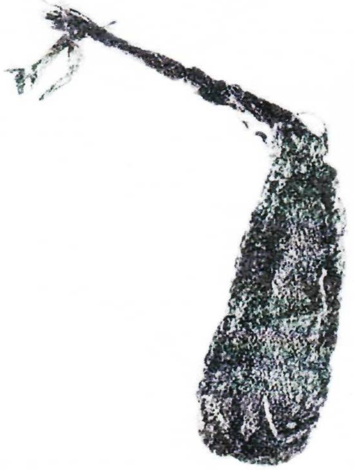
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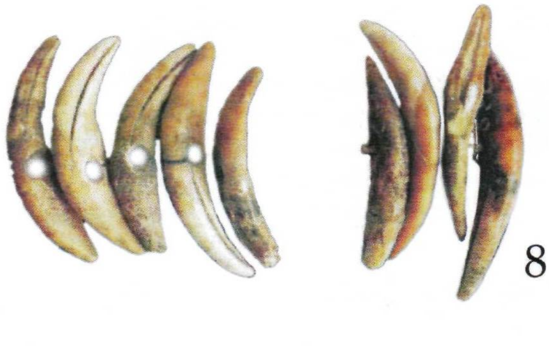
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Fig. 2.15. Selection of Slavic amulets from graves and settlement sites. 1 – Kaptorga from Biskupin. Reproduced after Hensel 1960, p. 108. 2 – Kaptorga from Chełm. Reproduced after Hensel 1960, p. 193. 3 – Drawing of a patrice from Brześć Kujawski used for producing kaptorgas. Reproduced after Kostrzewski 1962, p. 255. 4 – Photo of a patrice from Brześć Kujawski used for producing kaptorgas. Reproduced after Hensel 1960, p. 105. 5 and 6 – Silk and woolen pouches from Opole, perhaps used for storing amulets. Reproduced after Hensel 1960, p. 195. 7 and 8 – Kauri shells and animal teeth from the early medieval cemetery at Gruczno, perhaps used as amulets. Reproduced after Boguwolski, Hyss 2005. Not to scale.

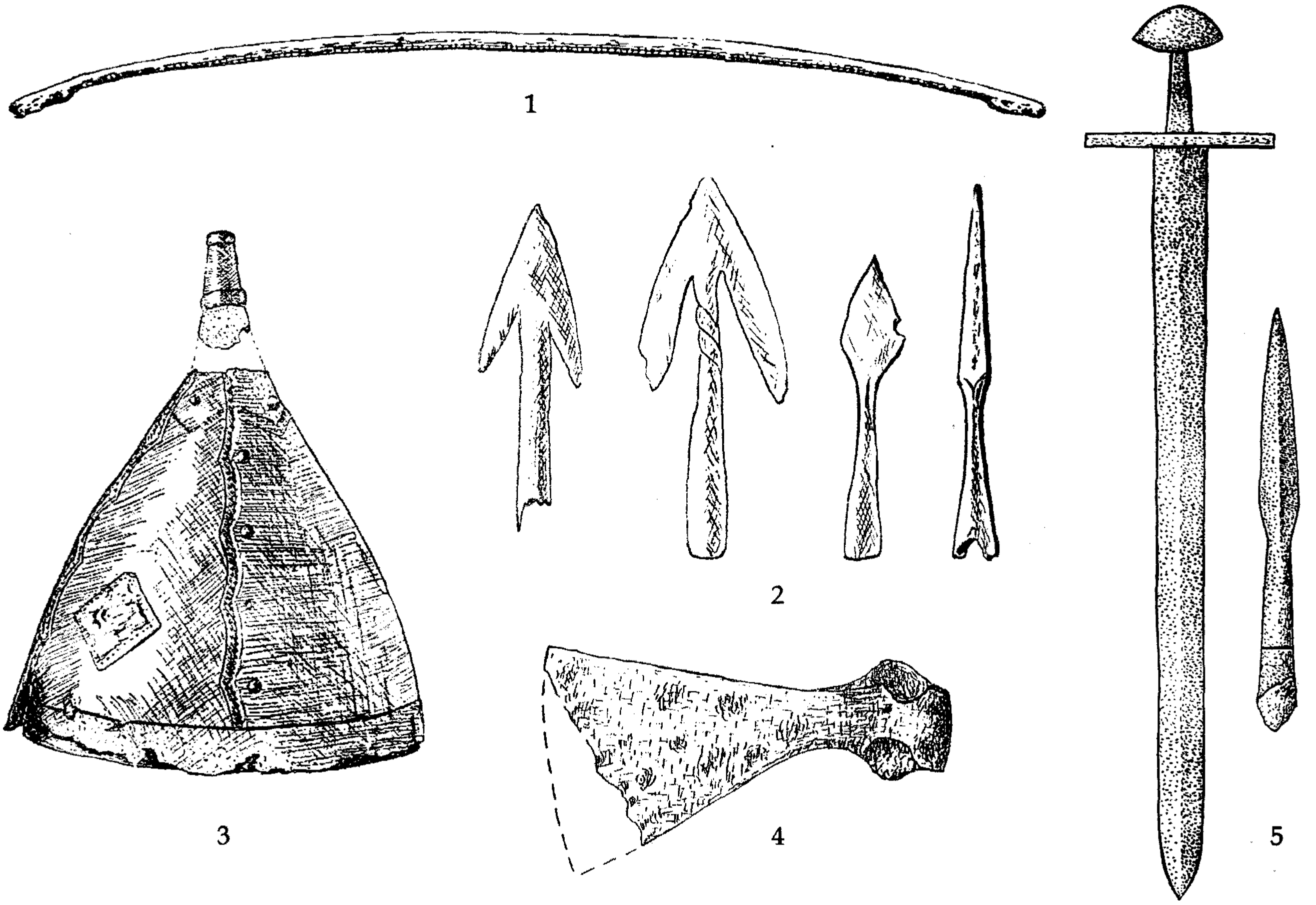

Fig. 2.16. Selection of different types of weapons used in early medieval Poland. 1 – Bow from Opole. Reproduced after Kostrzewski 1962, p. 269. 2 – Iron arrowheads from Gniezno. Reproduced after Kostrzewski 1962, p. 269. 3 – Helmet from Gorzuchy. Reproduced after Kostrzewski 1962, p. 280. 4 – Axe from grave 19 at Brześć Kujawski. Reproduced after Kaszewscy 1971, plate III, p. 372. 5 – Sword and spearhead from Czersk. Reproduced after Leciejewicz 1989, p. 262. Not to scale.

of 'warriors'. However, recent studies of the practice of weapon burial in Poland are beginning to add nuance to this anachronistic view and highlight the symbolic role of military equipment.[119] The argument that weapons should not only be regarded as indicators of warriors is further substantiated by the fact that swords, spears and axes are encountered in early medieval cemeteries only relatively rarely. The scarcity of weapons in graves may seem quite surprising given the hundreds of strongholds that dotted the landscape of Poland under the rule of the Piast dynasty. However, the lack of weapons in cemeteries which are located in close vicinity to strongholds does not necessarily mean that 'warriors' or members of the stronghold's garrison were not buried there. Rather, it seems to indicate that weapons were not regarded as important components of funerary rites at that time. It is possible that when a warrior died, his costly military equipment was passed on to someone else, perhaps a family member, friend or even returned to a feudal lord.

Based on these observations, it seems that among the Slavs who inhabited the area of Poland in the Early Middle Ages, weapons were only deposited in graves in very exceptional circumstances and with special intentions in mind. Even individuals who were actively involved in military activities during their lives may not have been buried with war gear. Unfortunately, we do not know what exactly led to burying the dead with weapons or what these objects meant to those conducting the ceremonies. Did they mark the special status of the dead? Or perhaps the act of placing weapons in graves signified the wealth and prestige of those who orchestrated and attended the funerals? Were weapons necessary in the journey to the Otherworld? Or did they serve some special protective role, perhaps guarding the grave and its contents or enabling the dead to defend themselves against something or someone? The answers to these questions are very difficult to provide; the meanings behind weapon burials probably varied among individuals and in different regions of Poland.

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[119] See, for example, Sikora 2014.

Clay and wooden vessels

Early medieval inhumation graves discovered in Poland occasionally contain vessels made of clay or organic materials (**Fig. 2.17**). A number of graves were also furnished with bronze bowls. In this section we shall take a closer look at these finds and try to discuss their potential symbolic meanings.

Clay vessels from funerary contexts have different shapes and sizes (for example, s-shaped, with a cylindrical neck or flask-shaped).[120] They are often discovered in graves furnished with military equipment. Most of these finds come from the area of Central Poland and southern Masovia.[121] Clay vessels were usually placed at the feet of the deceased and it is rare to find more than one such vessel in a grave.[122] Although a number of scholars have suggested that some clay vessels were produced specifically for burial and never used in everyday life, this view is difficult to support since there are no clear differences between clay vessels recovered from settlement sites and graves.[123] Specialist analyses of residue demonstrate that some vessels from funerary contexts may have contained milk products, fish and meat, but it is difficult to determine exactly what kind of food these traces represent.[124] As mentioned above, the discovery of loose pottery shards in graves (or in their fills) is sometimes interpreted as evidence of rituals associated with the 'cult' or 'worship' of the dead,[125] or as traces of the ritual breaking of pots at the graveside, perhaps during feasts that accompanied funeral ceremonies. As interesting as these interpretations are, it is also possible that these shards are simply the remains of damaged and redeposited pots which got mixed up with the soil and accidentally thrown into the grave pit during its backfilling.

Another category of vessels discovered in early medieval Slavic graves includes buckets with iron rims and occasionally bronze fittings.[126] This group of finds has recently received increased scholarly attention in the works of Andrzej Janowski and Tomasz Kurasiński.[127] Current overviews of graves with buckets from Poland have demonstrated that such vessels are usually buried at the feet of the deceased, with only a few cases in which they are placed elsewhere (for example near the head).[128] The purpose of buckets could have been varied; in past research it has been suggested that they may have been part of equestrian equipment used for feeding horses. More recent studies, however, have rightly rejected this problematic interpretation and shown that the volume of the buckets is too small to effectively use them to feed animals.[129] Moreover, it has been argued that, since the vast majority of buckets are made of yew (which has toxic qualities and in some societies strong symbolic associations with notions of death),[130] it is rather more likely that they were special vessels, perhaps exclusively intended for funerary purposes. In the opinion of Janowski and Kurasiński,[131] some buckets discovered in funerary contexts may have played a role in communal 'feasting with the dead' and some could have contained food and drink which the deceased required in their journey to the Otherworld.

Finally, it is worth mentioning the bronze bowls which occasionally accompany the dead buried in Poland. The bowls display some diversity, including decorated and undecorated examples,[132] but are generally regarded as rather luxurious objects. Interpretations of bronze bowls are varied; scholars typically see them

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[120] Janowski, Kurasiński 2008, p. 73.

[121] See Rauhut 1971a; Janowski, Kurasiński 2008, pp. 72–73.

[122] Janowski, Kurasiński 2008, p. 75. Some exceptions are known, for example, from the cemetery at Lutomiersk.

[123] Janowski, Kurasiński 2008, p. 74.

[124] Janowski, Kurasiński 2008, p. 76.

[125] Janowski, Kurasiński 2008, p. 73.

[126] E.g. Kufel-Dzierzgowska 1975, p. 379.

[127] Janowski, Kurasiński 2008; Kurasiński 2015a.

[128] Janowski, Kurasiński 2008, pp. 65–66; Kurasiński 2015a.

[129] Kurasiński 2015a.

[130] Janowski, Kurasiński 2008, pp. 70–71; see also Kobielus 2006, pp. 44–45.

[131] Janowski, Kurasiński 2008, p. 72.

[132] Poklewski 1961.

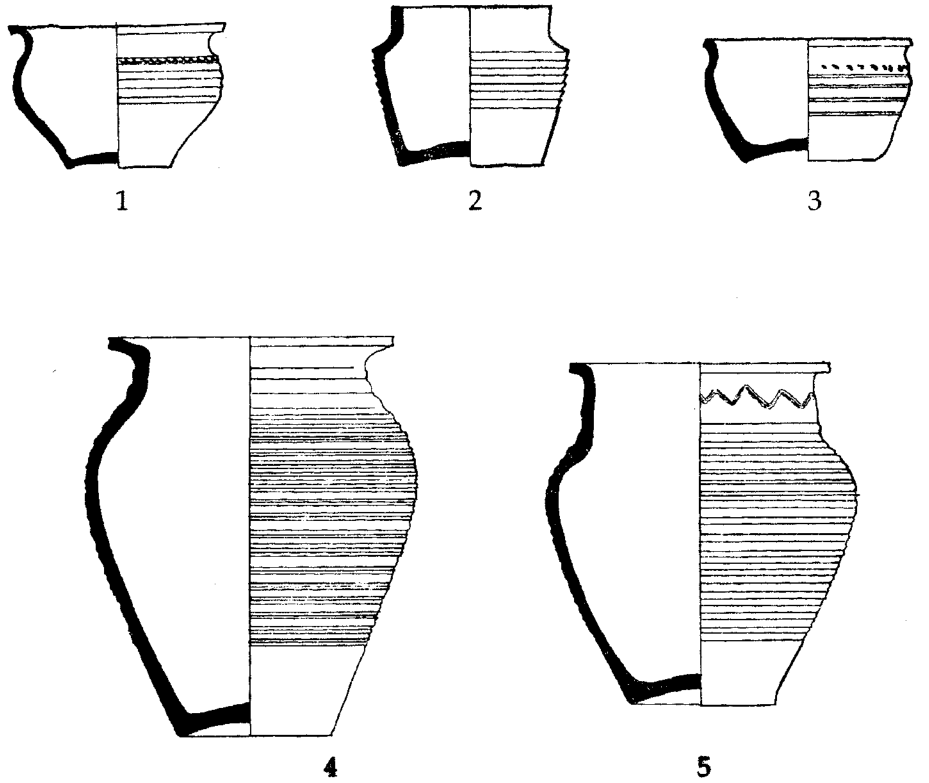

Fig. 2.17. Selection of ceramic vessels from early medieval graves at Lutomiersk. Reproduced after Nadolski, Abramowicz, Poklewski 1959, plate XC.

as hand-washing basins or objects associated with the early Christians.[133]

Tools and utensils

A range of graves from early medieval Poland contain different kinds of tools and small utensils (**Fig. 2.18**). The most commonly found objects are iron knives,[134] other small items buried with the dead include, for example, combs, needles, strike-a-lights,[135] whetstones,[136] scissors, keys, sickles, fishing hooks and awls[137]. We do not know for certain what the role of these objects was and what exactly they symbolised in funerary contexts. They may have been personal possessions of the deceased, but it is also possible that they belonged to the mourners and were placed in graves with some special purpose in mind. Some interesting interpretations of the meanings of small utensils from early medieval graves in Poland have recently been provided by Tomasz Kurasiński,[138] Kamil Kajkowski and Paweł Szczepanik.[139]

In his analysis, Kurasiński focuses only on utensils discovered in the so-called 'warrior graves' (i.e. graves including weapons). In his view, they probably manifested the social position and profession of the dead.[140] He argues that the (after)life in the Otherworld did not differ significantly from normal everyday existence and that the dead had the same needs as the living. Consequently, in Kurasiński's opinion, the utensils buried with the dead might have proved useful for them in the afterlife.[141]

Kajkowski and Szczepanik[142] argue that small utensils in graves did not necessarily mark the professions of the dead but had a broad range of symbolic overtones, referring, among other things, to supernatural beings and the competences of some of the Slavic gods.

Serious interpretational problems arise when we try to interpret the meanings of knives in funerary contexts.[143] Knives are among the most frequently found objects in early medieval Polish graves, and

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[133] Janowski, Kurasiński 2008, p. 79.

[134] On knives in graves in Central Poland, see Kufel-Dzierzgowska 1975, p. 377. On knives in graves in Greater Poland (especially in the cemetery at Dziekanowice), see Wrzesiński 2000d.

[135] On strike-a-lights in graves in Central Poland, see Kufel-Dzierzgowska 1975, p. 379.

[136] On whetstones in graves in Central Poland, see Kufel-Dzierzgowska 1975, p. 379.

[137] For a more thorough discussion on various utensils in graves, see Kurasiński 2008.

[138] Kurasiński 2008.

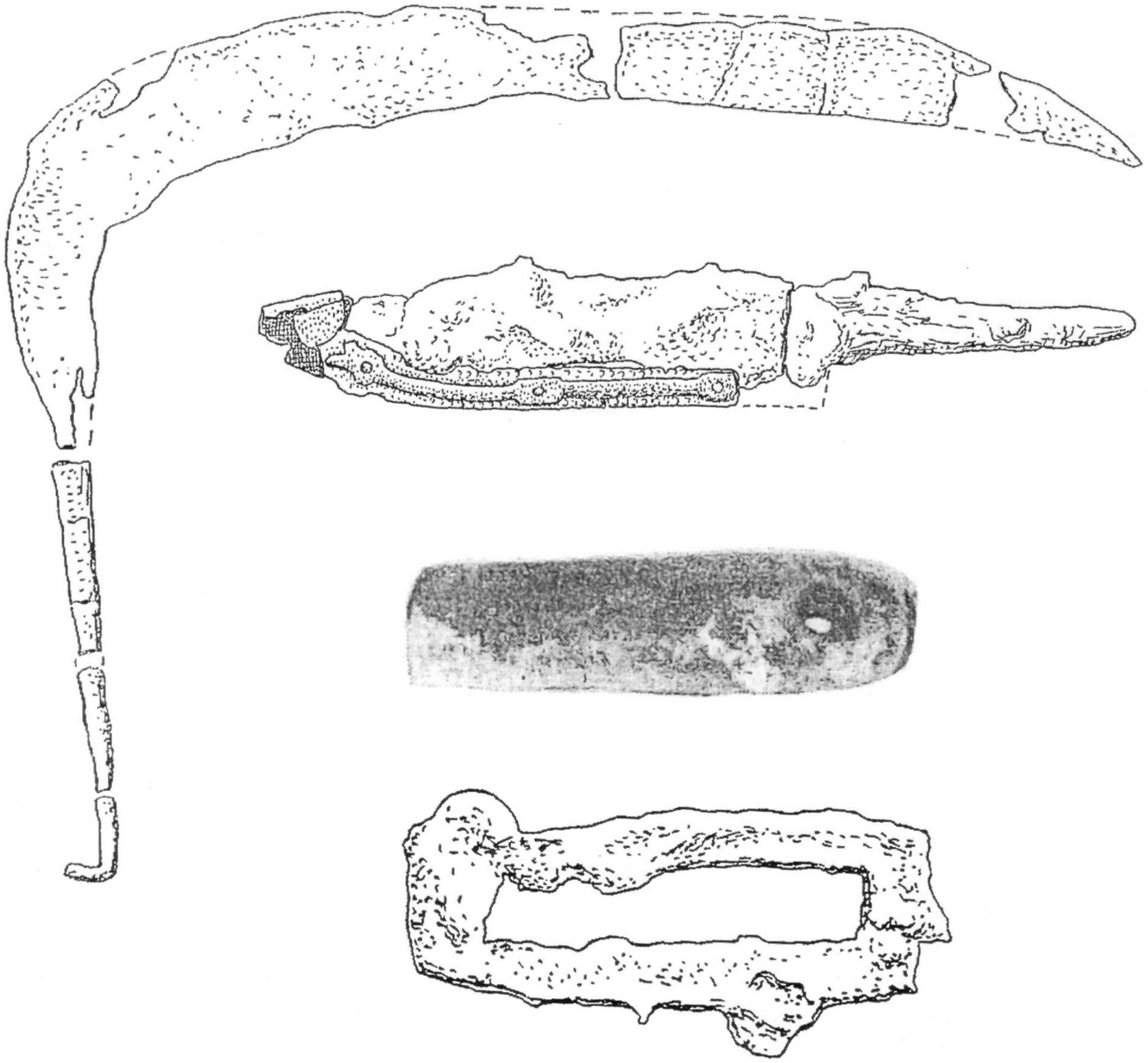
[139] Kajkowski, Szczepanik 2014.

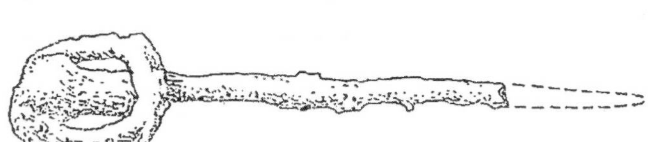
[140] Kurasiński 2008, p. 28.

[141] Kurasiński 2008, p. 29.

[142] Kajkowski, Szczepanik 2014, p. 412.

[143] Wrzesiński 2000d.

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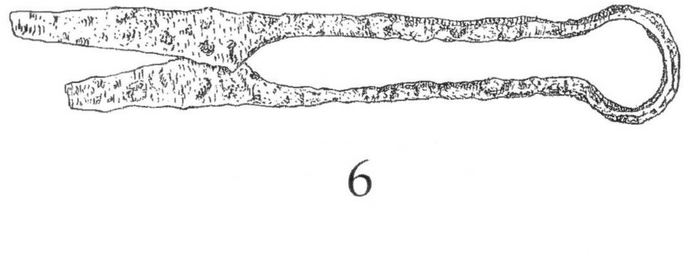
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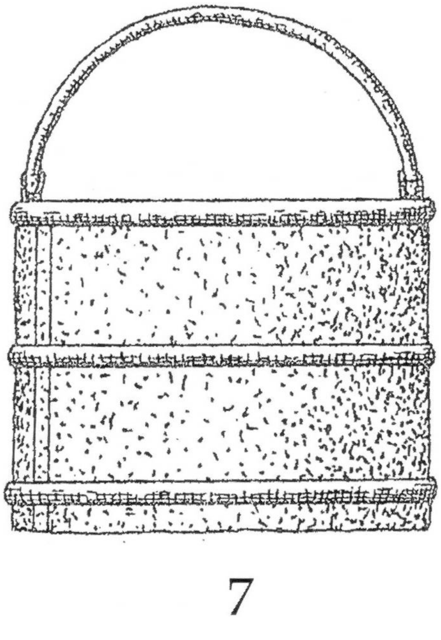
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Fig. 2.18. Selection of tools and utensils from funerary contexts in early medieval Poland. 1 – Iron sickle from grave 12 at Tomice. Reproduced after Wachowski 1975, p. 127. 2 – Iron knife in a decorated scabbard with a copper alloy zoomorphic motif from grave 47 at Tomice. Reproduced after Wachowski 1975, p. 130. 3 – Whetstone from grave 15 at Złota Pińczowska. Reproduced after Miśkiewicz 1967, plate II, p. 99. 4 – Strike-a-light from the cemetery at Stara Rudna. Reproduced after Wachowski 1975, p. 125. 5 – Ringed pin from grave 34/1935 at Nowa Wieś Wrocławska. Reproduced after Wachowski 1975, p. 106. 6 – Iron scissors from grave 172 at Brześć Kujawski. Reproduced after Kaszewscy 1971, plate VIII, p. 380. 7 – Wooden bucket decorated with iron sheet from grave 21 at Komorowo. Reproduced after Malinowski, Malinowski, Lorkiewicz 1994, p. 23.

although some scholars have previously suggested that knives mark the graves of 'free' people,[144] this does not seem probable. The argument that the presence of knives distinguishes free men from slaves can be easily dismissed because there are many graves with lavish furnishings (implying the high status of the dead) which do not contain any knives at all. Therefore, rather than interpreting knives as markers of social status, we should try to consider their other meanings and applications. It is also worth highlighting, that in contrast to other categories of utensils discovered in early medieval graves in Poland, knives appear in funerary contexts both singly and in larger numbers.[145] Past scholars have often overlooked the fact that some knives were discovered in graves in scabbards, while other knives were buried without them – there must have been some deliberate motivation behind this practice. Instances of concealing knives by wrapping them in textiles or placing them in organic pouches have also been noted, for example at Łączyno Stare.[146] Moreover, as Kurasiński[147] has observed, a significant number of knives found in funerary contexts are broken. While in some cases this damage may have resulted from the fragility of these objects or various post-depositional factors, it is difficult to explain why so many knives from funerary contexts bear signs of intentional damage. Could it be that knives were broken at the graveside during funerary ceremonies? What would this action mean? So far this problem has not been debated very extensively,[148] although scholars have considered cases in which knives are placed in unusual locations within the grave – for example near the head or at the feet. Some knives also appear to have been stuck in the skeleton.[149] This is often seen as an apotropaic measure intended to 'hold' the dead in their graves, but this is not the only possible explanation. Perhaps some knives were placed in the graves so that the dead could protect themselves on their way to the Otherworld, or with the intention of providing them with a multifunctional tool with various practical applications?

Another group of objects discovered in some of the early medieval graves in Poland are iron strike-a-lights and flint stones. The discoveries of strike-a-lights in different relations to the body (e.g. at the belt, on the chest, at the head or foot end of the grave) could convey various meanings, but may also suggest how these items were carried in life. For example, some of them may have been suspended at the belt while others could be hung around the neck. It has been argued that strike-a-lights, as objects used for starting fires, may have served the role of apotropaic items. It might perhaps be possible to perceive them as tools for producing fire and warmth during the (cold?) journey to the Otherworld, or to be used in some other way in the afterlife. I find it less probable that they were intended as signals of status or some special role which the dead had played in life, as suggested for example by Moździoch, who – in a very traditional spirit – argued that they mark people responsible for lighting the fire.[150]

Whetstones for sharpening tools or weapons are another interesting category of utensils discovered in early medieval graves in Poland. We do not know anything about the possible symbolic meanings of such objects among the Slavs, but they were endowed with many special qualities among the Anglo-Saxons and Viking Age Scandinavians.[151] Perhaps furnishing Slavic graves with whetstones gave the deceased an opportunity to sharpen their tools or weapons in the afterlife, but it is also possible that their presence in funerary contexts communicated other meanings that remain unknown to us.

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[144] See discussion in Kurasiński 2008, p. 31.

[145] Graves which contained two or more knives are known from cemeteries in Ciepłe, Końskie, Młodzikowo, Sowinki and several other places. See Kurasiński 2008, p. 30.

[146] Kurasiński 2008, p. 33.

[147] Kurasiński 2008, p. 34.

[148] But see Kurasiński 2008, p. 34.

[149] See, for example, Miśkiewicz 1967, pp. 96, 98.

[150] Moździoch 2002, p. 149.

[151] On the symbolic meanings of whetstones, see especially Mortimer, Pollington 2013 with references.

Among other utensils found in funerary contexts are ringed-pins made of iron.[152] The purpose and meaning of these objects has been debated for a long time and scholars today still remain unsure as to their actual function. It has been suggested that iron ringed-pins from Poland may have served as implements for fastening clothes or as styluses for writing on wax tablets. Some scholars have also interpreted them as awls, a form of cutlery, or even musical instruments. In Kurasiński's view, using ringed-pins as dining tools (as 'proto-forks') appears to be the most convincing explanation.[153] I fully agree with this idea. Given their many possible applications, the meaning of such items in graves remains unclear but if they were indeed items associated with the consumption of food, then we might speculate that they were something that the dead may have required in the Otherworld.

A relatively rare category of utensils discovered in funerary contexts includes iron sickles. Only a few objects of this type have been found in early medieval Polish graves so far.[154] Sickles are tools used for cutting grass or crops, but which also seem to have been endowed with a fairly broad range of symbolic meanings related to death and passing.[155] We know from ethnographic sources that they could be used as apotropaic objects intended to drive away evil or in some instances to prevent the dead from rising from their graves. This latter interpretation is well supported by ethnographic evidence and is reflected in recent excavations in an early modern cemetery at Drawsko Pomorskie in Poland.[156]

In addition to the objects discussed above, the early medieval graves from Poland also included other utensils such as keys, scissors,[157] fishing hooks,[158] combs,[159] needles[160] and spindle whorls,[161] but overall these categories of objects are extremely rare in funerary contexts. Some scholars, such as Helena Zoll-Adamikowa, regard these utensils as personal attributes and symbols of the profession of the deceased.[162] However, given the rarity of such items in graves and the variety of professions they are associated with (e.g. textile workers, fishermen etc.), this interpretation does not find solid support and should be dismissed. It is interesting to note in this context that in one grave from the cemetery at Grzebsk scissors were discovered in rather puzzling relation to the skeletal remains – they were buried between the legs of a man.[163] Could this mean that they were carried at the belt? Or perhaps they indicate something rather severe, such as actual or symbolic castration? Or maybe they substituted for a body part which the man had lost? This situation brings to mind an example of an interesting Viking Age grave from Repton, England, where a man was buried with a boar's tusk between his legs. Anthropological analyses of his skeletal remains have revealed that he suffered from severe wounds and that he may have been castrated. It has been argued that the boar's tusk substituted for the man's missing body part, namely his penis.[164]

With the exception of spindle whorls, all of the items discussed above have been found in graves including military equipment. Because of this, Tomasz Kurasiński[165] has interpreted them as personal equipment belonging to warriors who used them in life for various purposes. However, as well as analysing these utensils from a strictly functional perspective, Kurasiński rightly adds that, in funerary contexts, they may have possessed a fairly broad range of symbolic meanings. Some of these items may have served as objects of protection either for the dead or against their undesired *post-mortem* activity. Tools or utensils could have also been necessary during the journey to the Otherworld (e.g. strike-a-lights enabled the deceased to light a fire and produce warmth) or in *post-mortem* existence (e.g. ringed-pins for the consumption of food).

Without any doubt, objects buried with the dead had a wide range of symbolic meanings. Nevertheless, given the diversity of funerary practices on both a local and supra-local scale, it would be irresponsible to interpret every object from a particular category as meaning the same thing everywhere in early medieval Poland. The metaphorical qualities of these items probably varied from place to place and depended on their overall appearance, condition, context (e.g. placement in the grave) and the intentions of the mourners responsible for depositing them. In conclusion, it is fair to say that no single explanation will ever be able to embrace the complexities of past funerary behaviour and the items used during acts of burial.

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[152] Kurasiński 2008, p. 38. It should be noted, however, that in early medieval Poland there is some evidence for decorating ringed-pins with other, perhaps non-ferrous, metals.

[153] Kurasiński 2008.

[154] Kurasiński 2008, p. 40.

[155] Kurasiński 2008, p. 41.

[156] Gregoricka, Betsinger, Scott, Polcyn 2014; Polcyn, Gajda 2015.

[157] Kurasiński 2008, pp. 42–43.

[158] Kurasiński 2008, p. 43.

[159] Kurasiński 2008, p. 44.

[160] Kurasiński 2008, p. 43.

[161] Kajkowski, Szczepanik 2014, pp. 417–419.

[162] See discussion in Kurasiński 2008, p. 42.

[163] Kurasiński 2008, p. 42.

[164] Jensen 2010, p. 175; Gardeła 2014, p. 65.

[165] Kurasiński 2008, p. 46.

2. IMAGINING THE OTHERWORLD: ICONOGRAPHIC REPRESENTATIONS OF THE SLAVIC COSMOS

We have now examined material evidence for the performance of funerals in early medieval Poland and debated the symbolic meanings of grave goods buried with the dead. All of these considerations form an essential starting point for our further discussion of *how* and *where* the early medieval Slavs may have imagined their Otherworld to exist. Although we lack textual descriptions of the pre-Christian Slavic cosmos, it may be possible to unravel some basic ideas of afterlife by carefully analysing a range of iconographic finds containing anthropomorphic and zoomorphic motifs. Intriguingly, these motifs are often arranged on a kind of axis, perhaps representing the vertical alignment of the different worlds belonging to men, animals, gods and other beings. Although items with this imagery come from a vast geographical area that stretches from Western Slavic Polabia, through Poland, to the Eastern Slavic territories of contemporary Ukraine, their remarkable formal and conceptual similarities imply that they must have represented a very basic and deeply rooted cosmological idea that was widely distributed among the early medieval Slavs, regardless of tribal or territorial divides. The discussion that follows will begin with an analysis of the famous 'Sventovit from Zbrucz' and continue with explorations of the complex iconographic imagery depicted on a range of lavishly decorated knife scabbards and copper-alloy spurs.

The Zbrucz statue or the so-called 'Sventovit from Zbrucz'

The Zbrucz statue, also known as 'Sventovit from Zbrucz' (Polish *Światowid ze Zbrucza*) is probably the most iconic find commonly (but not exclusively) associated with the pagan beliefs of the early medieval Slavs (**Fig. 2.19**).[166] It was discovered by accident in 1848 in the River Zbrucz (currently in Ukraine), and soon afterwards was transported to Kraków where it is still kept today at the Museum of Archaeology.[167] The statue stands 2.57m tall and is almost square in cross-section (the width of its sides ranges from 29–32cm).[168] Each of its four sides is decorated with carved anthropomorphic motifs and divided into three vertically aligned tiers (**Fig. 2.20**). The four sides of the uppermost tier represent tall anthropomorphic figures standing with arms bent at the elbows. The four sides of the middle tier show anthropomorphic figures with outstretched arms, and the three sides of the lowest tier have a carved anthropomorphic figure with raised arms (as if it was holding the tiers above). It is noteworthy that the figures shown in the uppermost part of the statue (all of which seem to share one head, with four faces crowned by a characteristic 'hat') each have different attributes – one is holding a horn and another an object which has been interpreted as a ring, disc[169] or cup.[170] The figure with the horn is also accompanied by a representation of a horse with a sheathed sabre above it. Based on its various features, the Zbrucz statue is often dated to around the tenth or eleventh century.[171]

Since the moment of its discovery it has been argued that the statue from Zbrucz represents the god Sventovit, one of the main deities of the pre-Christian Slavs.[172] This interpretation is predominantly based on its iconography, and especially the appearance of the four anthropomorphic faces in its upper part, each of which looks in a different direction. According to the Danish chronicler Saxo Grammaticus (Book XIV, Chapter 39),[173] a four-headed wooden statue of the god

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[166] Among the classic works on the 'Sventovit from Zbrucz' are, for example, Hadaczek 1904; Reyman 1933; Leńczyk 1964; 1965; Słupecki 1993, pp. 59–62; Szymański 1996. See also Kozłowski 1964 for technological analyses of the statue.

[167] The history of the statue's discovery is best described in the work of Leńczyk 1965.

[168] The measurements provided here are based on the work of Leńczyk 1964.

[169] The 'disc' interpretation is provided by Łapiński 1984, p. 137.

[170] The 'cup' interpretation is provided by Hadaczek 1904, p. 117.

[171] But see critical discussion in Łapiński 1984, pp. 130–131.

[172] On Sventovit see, for example, Gieysztor 2006, pp. 117–130.

[173] The classic edition of Saxo Grammaticus is by Olrik, Ræder 1931. For a Polish translation of this account, see Labuda 2003, pp. 178–181. For an English edition and translation, see Friis-Jensen, Fisher 2015.

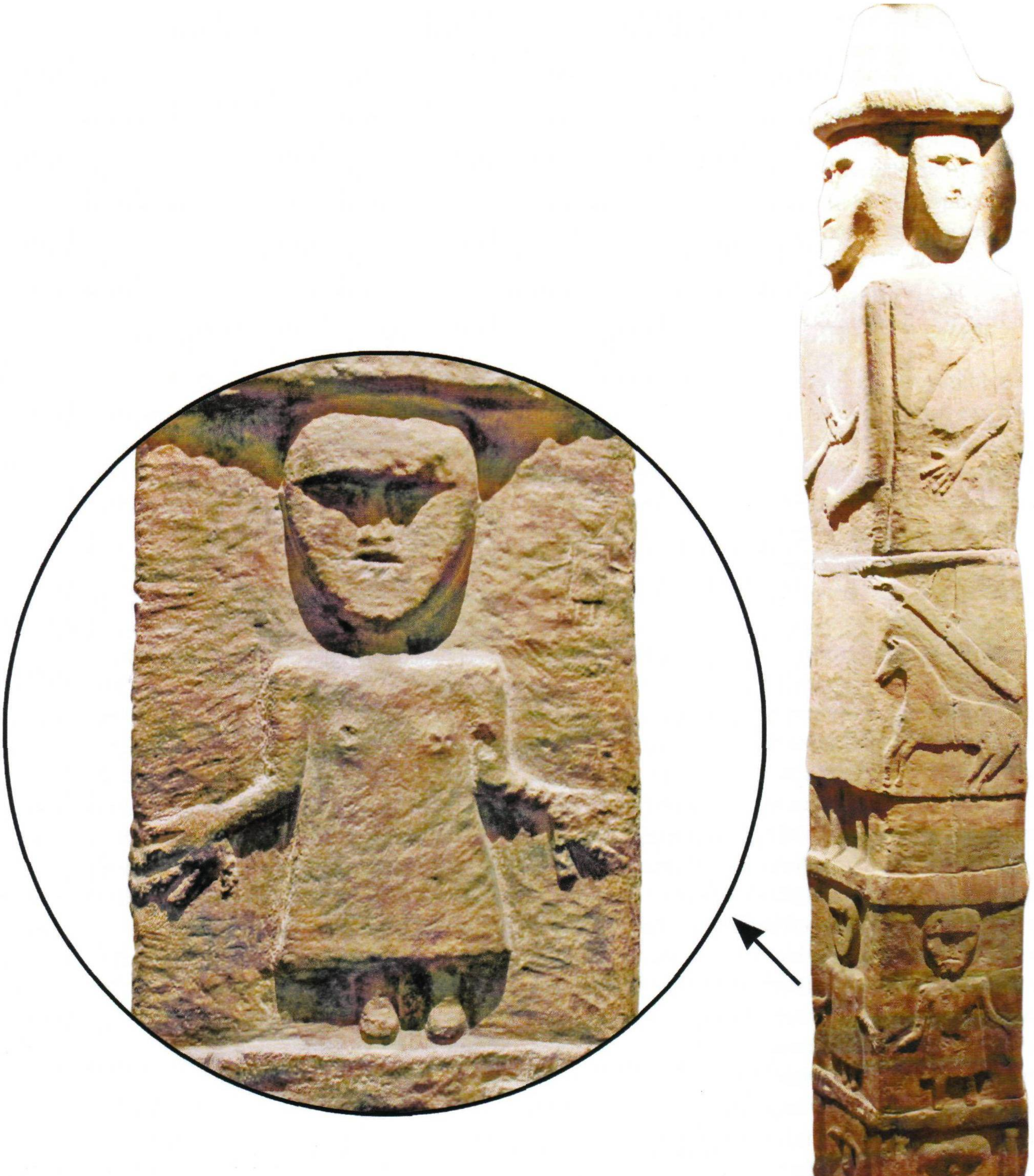

Fig. 2.19. Sventovit from Zbrucz (Polish *Światowid ze Zbrucza*). The enlarged detail shows a figure with outstretched arms and another smaller figure in the upper right corner. Photo by Leszek Gardeła.

Sventovit stood in the pagan temple of the Polabian Slavs in Arkona, Rügen. This account has led scholars to believe that the find from Zbrucz, although made of limestone and discovered hundreds of kilometers away from Polabia, represents the same god. The idea of multi-headed gods seems to have spread very widely among the Slavs, as suggested by the discovery of a range of small wooden figures or tool-handles, each with a number of anthropomorphic heads. Items of this kind are known from various parts of Poland, Denmark and Sweden, and all come from roughly the tenth or eleventh centuries, making them contemporary with the find from Zbrucz.[174] Although some scholars, for example Władysław Duczko and Błażej Stanisławski, have argued that the multi-headed figures are connected with Scandinavian culture,[175] it has recently been shown that such views do not find solid support.[176]

Over the years, the Zbrucz statue has attracted unparalleled scholarly interest and has been debated in numerous publications on Slavic mythology, in Poland, elsewhere in Europe, and beyond. The idea that it represents the god Sventovit was expressed soon after its discovery in the nineteenth century.[177] However, alternative views have also been offered, for example linking it with the beliefs of nomadic tribes.[178] In 2013, two Ukrainian scholars published an interesting study in which they suggested the possibility that the statue could be a fake, a product of the nineteenth-century romantic fascination with Slavic antiquities.[179] This controversial idea is currently being hotly debated in Polish and international scholarship and will be critically explored in further detail within the framework of an interdisciplinary project aimed at investigating the wider context and meaning of the Zbrucz statue. Although the problem of the statue's cultural origin and authenticity still remains a matter of discussion, the present study assumes that it is a product of early medieval Slavs. It will therefore be examined and described in the context of their beliefs.

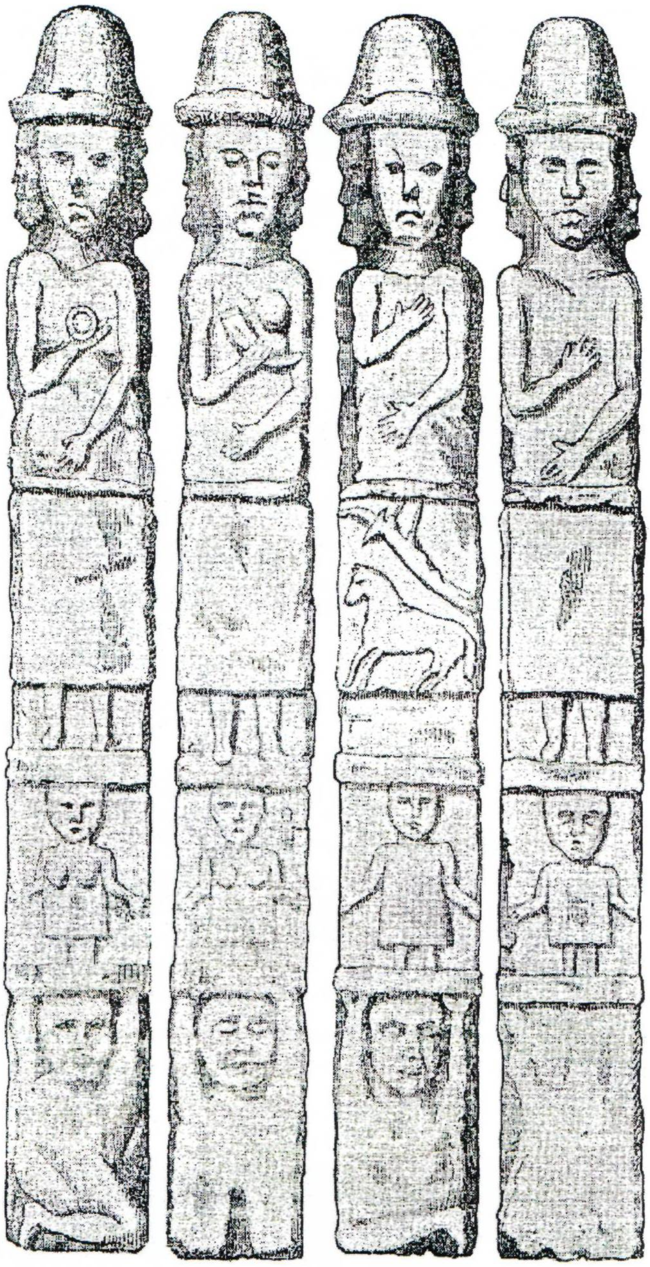

Fig. 2.20. The four sides of Sventovit from Zbrucz. After Leńczyk 1964, p. 8.

The upper tier of the statue is often believed to be a representation of Sventovit.[180] The horse and sabre are interpreted as features which highlight the god's warlike character. The presence of a horn also matches the description of Svantevit provided by the chronicler Saxo Grammaticus.[181] Interestingly, Reyman suggested that since the figure on the side with the horse is shown

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[174] See discussion on these figures in Filipowiak 1986, p. 26; Filipowiak 1993, p. 29; Lamm 1987; Kajkowski, Szczepanik 2013; Gardeła 2014, pp. 92–98; Kajkowski 2014a, pp. 222–223.

[175] See, for example, Duczko 2000, p. 39; Stanisławski 2013, pp. 133–134, 204–207.

[176] Gardeła 2014, pp. 92–98; see also Wawrzeniuk 2016, pp. 17, 101–106, 134–135 who seems to agree with my views.

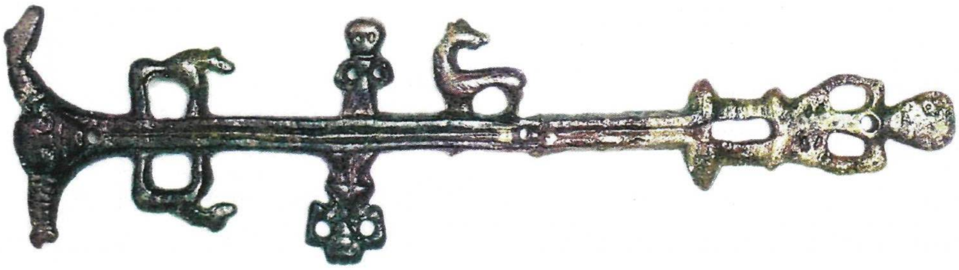
[177] Reyman 1933, p. 4; Leńczyk 1964, p. 28; Hensel 1983, p. 119.

[178] Wawrzeniecki 1929; Szafrański 1995.

[179] Komar, Chamajko 2013.

[180] Reyman 1933, pp. 11–12.

[181] On the account of Saxo Grammaticus and the Zbrucz statue, see Hensel 1983.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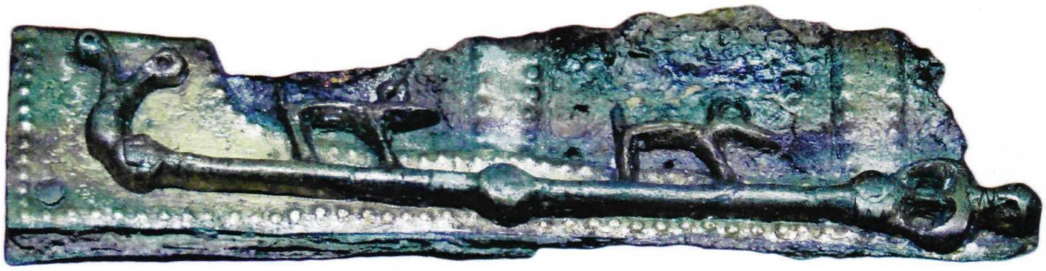
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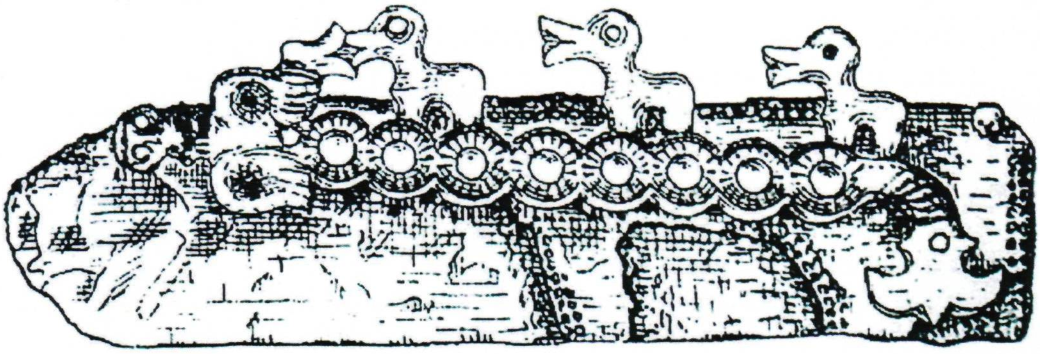
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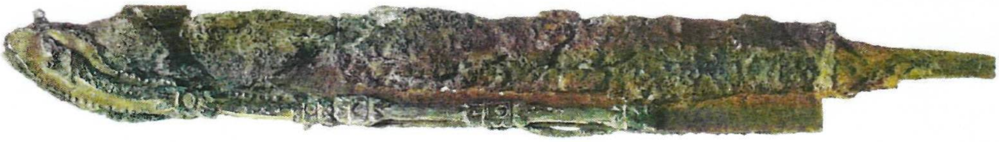
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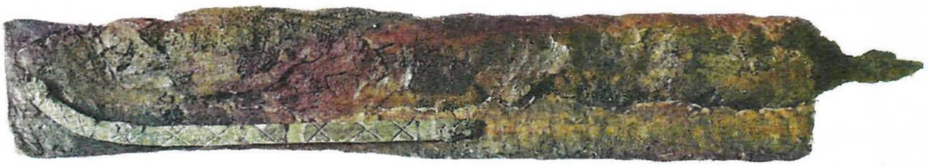
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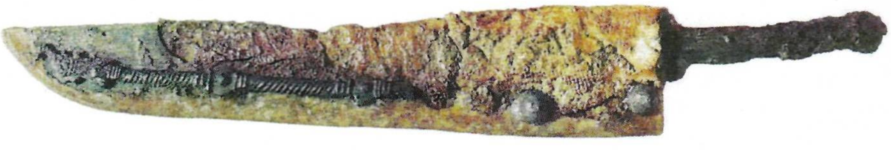
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Fig. 2.21. Knife scabbards and fittings with zoomorphic decorations. 1 – Knife fitting from Oldenburg with anthropomorphic and zoomorphic decorations. Reproduced after Gabriel 2000, p. 139. 2 – Knife scabbard from Ostrów Lednicki. Photo by Leszek Gardeła. 3 – Knife scabbard from Brześć Kujawski. Reproduced after Kaszewscy 1971, p. 389. 4–6 – Knife scabbards from Sowinki. Reproduced after Kurnatowska 2008, p. 347.

without legs, it may be interpreted as 'sitting' on the animal.[182] However, it is also noteworthy that some scholars consider two of the four anthropomorphic figures depicted in the upper tier of the statue to be female.[183]

The four anthropomorphic figures (one on each side of the statue) shown *en face* in the middle tier are generally regarded as dancing (as indicated by their thumbs pointing downwards, implying that they may be 'holding hands').[184] Two of them appear to be female, as shown by their clearly visible breasts. According to scholars who interpret the 'Sventovit from Zbrucz' as a model of *axis mundi*, this tier refers to the human world. Interestingly, near the head of one of the figures is a representation of an identical figure, but in miniature (see **Fig. 2.19**). This intriguing detail, hardly visible today, is sometimes interpreted as depicting a child,[185] or even the human soul.

The figures shown on the lowest tier are collectively regarded as a representation of the chthonic god Triglav/Weles, who in textual sources is described as having three heads.[186] This identification is particularly substantiated, because only three figures are shown on the sides of the lowest tier (i.e. they have three heads in total). In this light, the lowest part of the statue could indeed be interpreted as a referring to the underworld.

A number of scholars have considered the Zbrucz statue as reflecting 'a complex cosmological programme' or 'a philosophical treatise carved in stone'.[187] However, Adam Łapiński ironically observes that the methods and ideological perspectives of those who dealt with this object in their research have led to a situation in which, after over 130 years of study, the only thing we can say with certainty is that the Zbrucz statue 'is old and displays numerous associations with different cultures'.[188] While its interpretations could certainly be further expanded and deepened, in general it can be argued that the Zbrucz statue does indeed appear to be a model[189] of the pagan universe, and/or a schematic representation of social or divine order. Despite some methodological and source-critical concerns, I agree with those scholars who regard the figure in its upper tier as a sky god (e.g. Sventovit or its East Slavic equivalent, Perun), the figures in the central part as humans, and the three-headed character in the lowest tier as a chthonic god (e.g. Triglav/Weles). The Zbrucz statue is certainly a unique object: although a range of other anthropomorphic stone sculptures have been found in the Slavic area, it is the only one that conveys such a rich iconographical programme.

In addition to stone sculptures, potentially representing pre-Christian gods or perhaps heroes and ancestors,[190] a range of large wooden statues have also been discovered in the area of Polabia and elsewhere in the Slavic world.[191] These anthropomorphic wooden statues, similar to the stone sculptures, are often linked with Slavic beliefs, but none of them are as elaborate as the find from Zbrucz. Nevertheless, it is possible to argue that similar 'models of the universe' to that shown on the Zbrucz find are also represented on other categories of objects from the West Slavic area, such as elaborately decorated knife scabbards portraying zoomorphic and anthropomorphic motifs. It is to these artefacts that we shall now turn our attention.

Knife scabbards with zoomorphic and anthropomorphic decorations

Excavations at a number of early medieval sites in Poland have brought to light a very interesting group of scabbards with zoomorphic and anthropomorphic decorations (**Fig. 2.21**). These scabbards are relatively rare finds of complex manufacture. They would probably have been rather costly, as some of them are ornamented with riveted sheets of copper alloy foil overlaid with an additional copper alloy bar. The copper alloy bar usually terminates with a representation of an animal head, probably a snake. Occasionally, as in the case of the scabbards from Brześć Kujawski and Ostrów Lednicki, the other end of the bar has a representation of an anthropomorphic figure. So far, scabbards of this type (or fragments of them) have been found at the following sites:

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[182] Reyman 1933, p. 12.

[183] See, for example, Łapiński 1984, p. 129.

[184] The dance interpretation was first proposed by Hadaczek 1904, p. 118. See also Reyman 1933, p. 10.

[185] Reyman 1933, pp. 10–11.

[186] Reyman 1933, p. 9; Trkanjec 2013.

[187] See Łapiński 1984, pp. 130–132 for an overview.

[188] Łapiński 1984, p. 132.

[189] Further discussions on the Zbrucz statue as a model of the universe may be found in Łapiński 1984.

[190] On stone statues see, for example, Gieysztor 2006, pp. 230–241.

[191] Słupecki 1993.

- Bodzia (Kuyavian-Pomeranian Voivodeship)[192]
- Brześć Kujawski (Kuyavian-Pomeranian Voivodeship)[193]
- Dziekanowice (Greater Poland Voivodeship)[194]
- Giecz (Greater Poland Voivodeship)[195]
- Kałdus (Kuyavian-Pomeranian Voivodeship)[196]
- Ostrów Lednicki (Greater Poland Voivodeship)[197]
- Sowinki (Greater Poland Voivodeship)[198]
- Tomice (Lower Silesian Voivodeship)[199]

Over the last decade or so there has been an increased interest in this group of finds, which has also given rise to some controversies. The scabbards found in the early medieval cemetery at Kałdus, for example, have been interpreted as ornamented in Mammen style,[200] and consequently have become associated with Viking Age Scandinavians. Although accepted by several scholars, in my view this interpretation is completely unsubstantiated. The decoration of the scabbards, especially their zoomorphic motifs, are not at all similar to Mammen style and have no direct parallels in *any* archaeological finds from Northern Europe. I have discussed this problem more extensively elsewhere,[201] dismissing previous arguments in favour of Scandinavian provenance and arguing for their origin in the West Slavic area.

An interesting study on scabbards with zoomorphic and anthropomorphic decorations has recently been published by Paweł Szczepanik,[202] who interprets them in the context of Slavic pre-Christian beliefs. Drawing on the earlier work of Ingo Gabriel,[203] who interpreted an analogous scabbard from Oldenburg in Germany as a model of Slavic cosmos, Szczepanik applies similar ideas to the scabbards from Poland. His interpretation of these objects is based on two main premises and assumptions:

- A tripartite division of the Slavic cosmos.[204] Szczepanik sees evidence for this idea in the textual account of Ebbo, who describes the god Triglav in Szczecin and his rule over three realms: sky/heaven, earth and the underworld. As suggested above, it is probable that the Zbrucz statue also represents a tripartite model of the Slavic universe.
- The dualistic nature of Slavic cosmogonic myths (i.e. good-evil, order-chaos, sky/heaven-underworld etc.) and the existence of two major gods with opposing characteristics: Sventovit/Perun and Triglav/Weles.

While it is impossible to thoroughly discuss Szczepanik's ideas here, it suffices to say that he sees the animal heads (snakes or dragons) depicted at the end of each bronze scabbard as a representation of the chthonic god Triglav/Weles (responsible for the underworld) and the anthropomorphic representation on the opposite end as Sventovit/Perun (responsible for the sky and thunder). As such, the scabbards could demonstrate in visual form the idea of dualism in Slavic beliefs and the opposition of the two gods. Consequently, the bar on which they are set can be understood as a world axis or *axis mundi*. In Szczepanik's view, the additional animals along the axis (interpreted as horses or cattle in the case of the finds from Oldenburg and Ostrów Lednicki and as birds[205] in the case of the scabbard from Brześć Kujawski) shown on some of the fittings can be regarded as mediatory creatures, which enable communication between humans and the gods. In my opinion, they can also be regarded as representations of human souls, perhaps on their way to the Otherworld.

It is remarkable how closely the iconographic programme and the arrangement of the zoomorphic motifs on some of these scabbards (especially the most elaborate ones from Brześć Kujawski, Ostrów Lednicki and the fitting from Oldenburg) resemble the imagery on the Zbrucz statue.[206] I do not think this is merely a coincidence; I would argue that this confirms a widespread idea of the *axis mundi* as an axis on which the pre-Christian Slavs believed their world(s) to be set.

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[192] Kowalska 2015, pp. 284–287.

[193] Kaszewscy 1971, p. 389; Szczepanik 2010, pp. 32–33.

[194] Szczepanik 2010, p. 38.

[195] Gardeła 2016a, p. 164.

[196] Chudziak 2001, pp. 69, 79; Szczepanik 2010, pp. 35–36.

[197] Szczepanik 2010, pp. 33–35.

[198] Krzyszowski 1995, p. 67; Szczepanik 2010, pp. 36–38.

[199] Wachowski 1975, p. 201; Szczepanik 2010, pp. 37–38.

[200] Chudziak 2001, pp. 69–70, 78–79, 89; 2002, p. 438.

[201] Gardeła 2016a, p. 164.

[202] Szczepanik 2010.

[203] Gabriel 2000, p. 139.

[204] Szczepanik 2010, p. 28.

[205] If the animals on the scabbard from Brześć Kujawski are really birds (geese?) then perhaps they could be regarded as representing human souls. In his study of Slavic beliefs, Gieysztor 2006, p. 143 mentioned an interesting story from a Czech source (the name of which, unfortunately, has not been provided in Gieysztor's publication and I have been unable to track it down) confirming that the dead may have flown to the Otherworld in a bird shape. The story tells of a man who was unhappy in his marriage. He has a dream in which his wife transforms into a goose and flies 'somewhere beyond the sea, to Weles' and never returns.

Copper alloy spurs with zoomorphic motifs

Elaborately decorated copper alloy spurs with zoomorphic motifs are another intriguing category of finds from early medieval Poland, whose meaning could relate to Slavic ideas about the cosmos and the Otherworld (**Fig. 2.22**). They have been discovered at several rather broadly distributed archaeological sites in Poland, including Cerkiewnik (Warmian-Masurian Voivodeship), Ciepłe (Pomeranian Voivodeship), Lutomiersk (Łódź Voivodeship) and Wrocław-Ostrów Tumski (Lower Silesian Voivodeship). Below, we shall briefly examine their overall appearance and the possible meanings of their iconographic programme. We will begin with their first and most puzzling examples from the cemetery at Lutomiersk in Central Poland.

The excavations in the cemetery at Lutomiersk[207] began in the 1940s under the German occupation. After the Second World War, they were continued by Polish archaeologists under the direction of Professor Konrad Jażdżewski. Overall, the cemetery probably comprised around 150 graves, many of which were lavishly furnished male burials with different kinds of weapons and equestrian equipment. The female burials contained silver jewellery of distinctly Slavic type. Bronze spurs with zoomorphic motifs were found in graves 5 and 10. Interestingly, grave 5 was a cremation, while grave 10 was an inhumation (**Fig. 2.23**). Each of the two graves contained a complete set of two spurs in addition to weapons and items of horse tack. The spurs in grave 5 lay among bundled up leather remains, leading the original excavators to assume that the spurs had actually served as saddle mounts.[208] All four copper alloy spurs from Lutomiersk look very similar (although specialist analyses which could determine if they were made from the same mould have not been conducted yet). Along the upper edge of their arms is a row of (walking?) animals resembling horned cattle.[209] Three such figures are represented on each of the spurs' arms (although not all of them are completely preserved today). The arms of the spurs terminate with an animal head resembling the head of a snake. Each arm contains a recess inside, and the back of the snake head at the end of each arm has a small rivet - probably for attaching a leather strap to hold them in place on the rider's feet. An interesting feature of the Lutomiersk spurs is that their points are missing, which makes them completely ineffective for riding a horse. Therefore, in the form in which they were deposited in the grave, they could not be used as spurs *per se*. Nevertheless, judging by their overall appearance, it is clear that they were originally intended as spurs and perhaps later (as a result of wear and damage?) reused to serve as saddle mounts.[210] Alternatively, we might speculate that the removal of the spurs' points was an intentional act which had some special ritual purpose during the funerary ceremonies. It is also possible that the spurs were intended for the journey to the Otherworld, although it is noteworthy that no horses were buried with the dead at Lutomiersk.

As mentioned above, similarly designed spurs are also known from three other sites located in different areas of Poland: Cerkiewnik,[211] Ciepłe[212] and Wrocław-Ostrów Tumski.[213] Regrettably, the spurs from Cerkiewnik and Wrocław-Ostrów Tumski are only preserved in fragments, preventing more detailed analysis. However, the spurs recently found in Ciepłe, inside the lavishly equipped chamber grave 42/2009, have survived in an excellent condition. Interestingly, it seems that the deceased man was actually buried with these spurs on his feet[214] (which could also, perhaps, tell us something about the manner of his journey to the Otherworld). In addition, his grave included a bucket, a spear and a sword. The bronze spurs from Ciepłe are particularly remarkable because - in contrast to their parallel discoveries from other sites - they are complete and have well preserved points. The points of the Ciepłe

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[206] Szczepanik 2010, pp. 30-31.

[207] For more detailed information regarding the cemetery at Lutomiersk see, for example, Jażdżewski 1951; 1952; Nadolski, Abramowicz, Poklewski 1959. See also latest discussions in Gardeła 2014, pp. 38-43; Grygiel 2014.

[208] Nadolski 1959, pp. 57-59; but see reinterpretations in Wachowski 2006; Grygiel 2014, pp. 707-708, 713.

[209] While I regard these animals as cattle, other scholars see them as 'horses with halos' (Polish *koniki w aureoli*) - see, for example, Ratajczyk 2013a, p. 295.

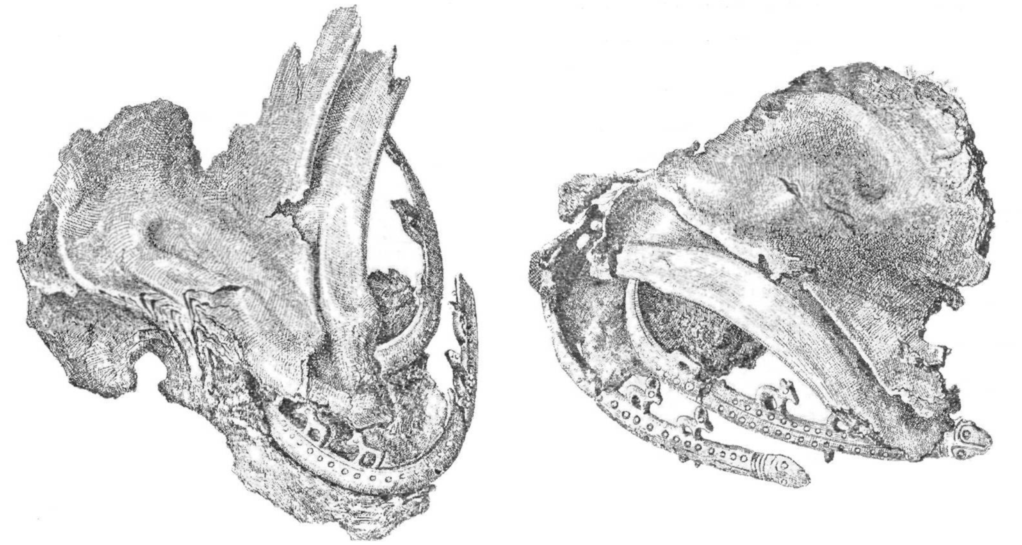
[210] Note that the idea of reusing the Lutomiersk spurs as saddle mounts is only plausible in the case of grave 5, where the remains of leather were found in direct contact with the spurs.

[211] Ziemlińska-Odoj 1992.

[212] Rataczyk 2013a; 2016, pp. 91-92, 94.

[213] Kaźmierczyk, Lasota 1979.

[214] Ratajczyk 2013a, p. 291.



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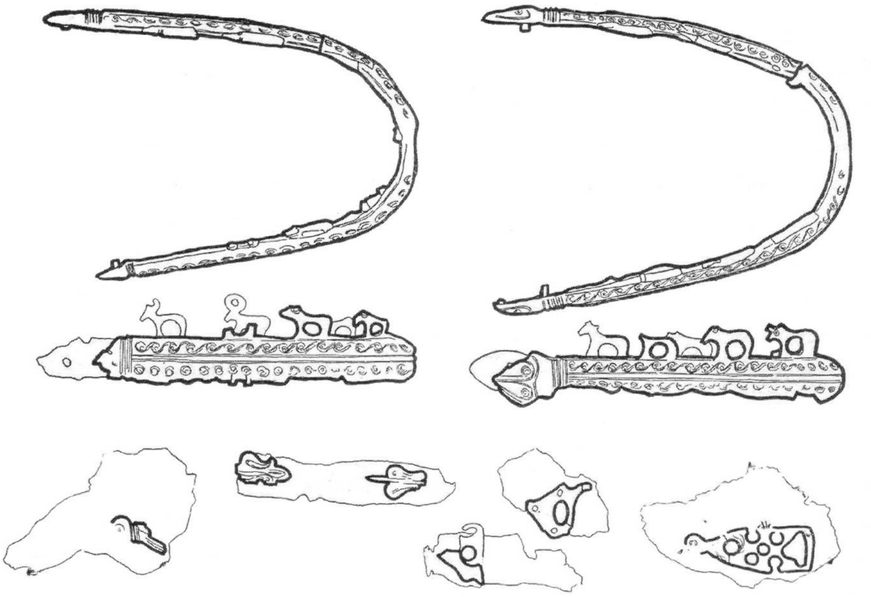

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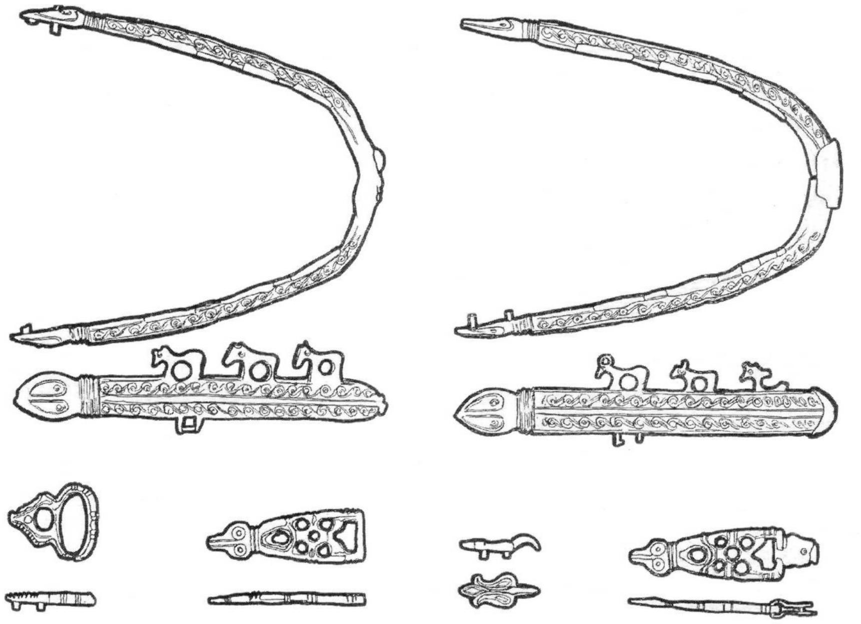

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Fig. 2.22. Bronze spurs with zoomorphic motifs from graves 5 and 10 at Lutomiersk. 1 – Bronze spurs found in grave 5. The organic remains might represent a saddle. After Nadolski, Abramowicz, Poklewski 1959, plate XLII. 2 – Bronze spurs from cremation grave 5 and fragments of decorated strap ends and fittings. Reproduced after Nadolski, Abramowicz, Poklewski 1959, plate XLIII. 3 – Bronze spurs from inhumation grave 10. Below a decorated buckle and strap fittings. Reproduced after Nadolski, Abramowicz, Poklewski 1959, plate XLIV.

spurs reveal a very important detail which all analogous finds lack – a three-dimensional miniature horse with its head turned backwards.[215] Furthermore, on the lower edge of the spurs' arms there are small loops with suspended bronze bells. In a recent analysis of these remarkable finds, Zdzisława Ratajczyk has expressed her uncertainty as to their cultural provenance and whether the spurs originate from Western, Eastern or Northern Europe (Scandinavia).[216] In my view, their overall decoration, as well as the nature of their iconographic programme, strongly suggests that they are actually of West Slavic design, most likely produced somewhere in Poland.

The main argument for classifying the spurs from Cerkiewnik, Ciepłe, Lutomiersk and Wrocław-Ostrów Tumski as West Slavic artefacts is that their zoomorphic decorations very closely resemble those which can be seen on the knife scabbards examined above. Moreover, I would argue that the spurs express exactly the same iconographical programme as that of the knives – the snake heads could represent the chthonic god Triglav/Weles, while the animals (horned cattle) could be understood as animal mediators or human souls travelling between the different worlds. The meaning of the horse with its head turned backwards (on the points of the spurs from Ciepłe) is more difficult to unravel, but horses in Slavic beliefs were very important creatures closely associated with the idea of prophecy and pagan gods such as Sventovit or Triglav/Weles.[217] It is noteworthy that a similar example of a backwards looking horse was also discovered at Wolin, but there it takes the form of a single figurine (it is unclear whether or not it is a part of some other object from which it broke off).[218]

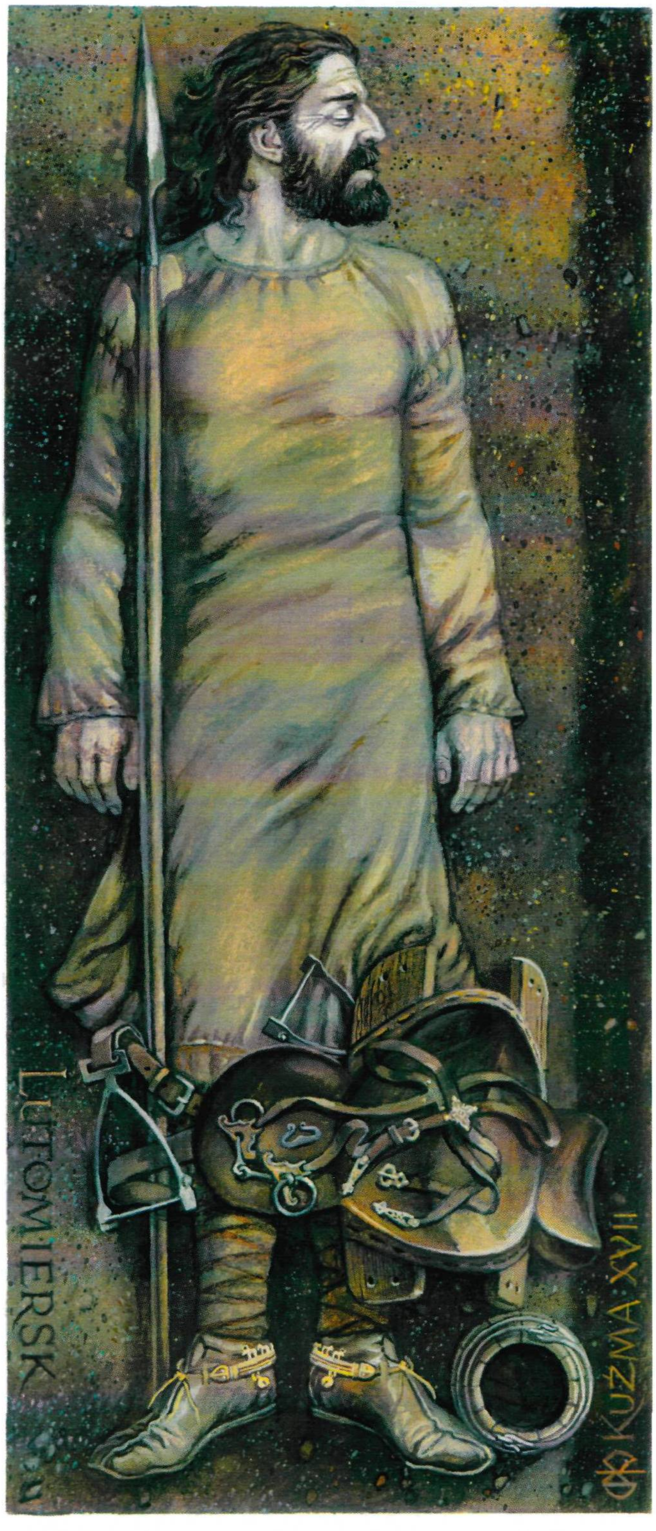

Fig. 2.23. Reconstruction of grave 10 from Lutomiersk. Illustration by Mirosław Kuźma. Copyright by Leszek Gardeła and Mirosław Kuźma.

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[215] It is worth mentioning that a copper alloy spur point (prick) of exactly the same type as the one from the spurs from Ciepłe has recently been found by a metal detectorist near Gorzów Wielkopolski. Two photographs of the find were published on an internet forum, but the artefact has not been given to a museum.

[216] Ratajczyk 2013a, p. 301.

[217] On the meaning of horses in Slavic and Scandinavian beliefs, see the latest work of Łukaszyk 2012, which contains further references.

[218] Łukaszyk 2012.

Iconographic representations of the Slavic cosmos: Conclusions

In light of the discussions above, it seems that the iconographical programme depicted on the Zbrucz statue, knife scabbards and spurs could provide important hints as to how the Slavs imagined their cosmos. The consistent repetition of iconographic motifs, suggests that all these finds represent the alignment of three different realms on a vertical *axis mundi* (**Fig. 2.24**). The upper world is the domain of the sky god (Sventovit/Perun), the middle world belongs to humans and the underworld is ruled over by a chthonic deity (Triglav/Weles), represented either as a snake (as in the case of the knife-scabbard fittings and ends of the copper alloy spurs) or as a three-headed anthropomorphic figure (as in the case of the Zbrucz statue). The animals shown on the knife scabbards or spurs can be regarded as mediatory creatures that travel between the worlds or as representations of human souls. Further support for these interpretations can be found in textual sources and ethnographic materials to which we shall now turn our attention.

3. OTHERWORLDLY DESTINATIONS FOR THE DEAD

Scholarly discussions on journeys to the Otherworld often begin by exploring the idea of the soul. In past societies, the soul could be understood and imagined in various ways. According to extant textual sources, among some societies (for example the early medieval Scandinavians) it was believed that some individuals had more than one soul.[219] On special occasions (not only at death) the soul(s) could leave the body, engage in different activities, and travel over very long distances. Some souls could even be stolen and would require the help of skilled ritual specialists to retrieve.

As Kamil Kajkowski has recently observed, it is unclear from extant textual sources if the early medieval Slavs knew about the idea of the soul at all.[220] The first accounts to refer to the Slavic belief in the existence of the soul begin to appear in late medieval times. According to these accounts, the soul behaved in a similar way to living people – it not only required food and drink, but could also walk and leave clearly visible marks of its presence, for example footprints. These sources imply that the souls of the dead demanded respect, especially when sharing the same space with the living people, such as in the household. Therefore, while working inside, one had to be careful to avoid hurting souls accidentally (e.g. by pouring dirty water on them or using sharp objects inappropriately).[221] Ethnographic accounts mention that, while some souls of the dead could occupy a special place within a household, others resided somewhere in the wild. There is yet another group of souls which, upon the individual's death, would venture to the Otherworld and return to the land of the living only on very special occasions. Where and what kind of Otherworld(s) will be the subject of the next section.

Slavic Otherworld(s) in textual accounts

There is only one medieval account which provides a brief commentary regarding what was allegedly believed to happen to the Western Slavs after they died. The author of this account, bishop Thietmar of Merseburg,[222] writes in the following:

> Though I may act as the whetstone which sharpens the iron but not itself, I would not be marked by the shame of a mute dog. Thus I direct the following to the ignorant and especially to the Slavs who believe that everything ends with temporal death, firmly indicating to all the faithful the certainty of future resurrection and of reward according to merit.[223]

Thietmar's statement might suggest that the Slavs had no idea of afterlife at all, but this can hardly be true given the references to the Slavic Otherworld(s) in later sources and the great effort taken to furnish graves in early medieval cemeteries.

Another important account, which may potentially shed some light on Slavic conceptions of the Otherworld, is provided by Ebbo, one of the authors who recorded the life and deeds of St. Otto.[224] *Ebbonis vita Ottonis, episcopi Bambergensis* describes a statue

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[219] On the concept of the soul in Nordic societies, see Strömbäck 1975. See also Heide 2006a; 2006b; 2006c.

[220] Kajkowski 2015a, p. 258.

[221] Moszyński 1967, p. 586.

[222] See comments in Kajkowski 2015a, p. 270; for Polish and English editions of Thietmar's chronicle, see Jedlicki 1953; Warner 2001.

[223] Thietmar of Merseburg, *Chronicon*, Book 1, Chapter 14; Translation after Warner 2001, p. 78.

[224] Gieysztor 2006, p. 148.

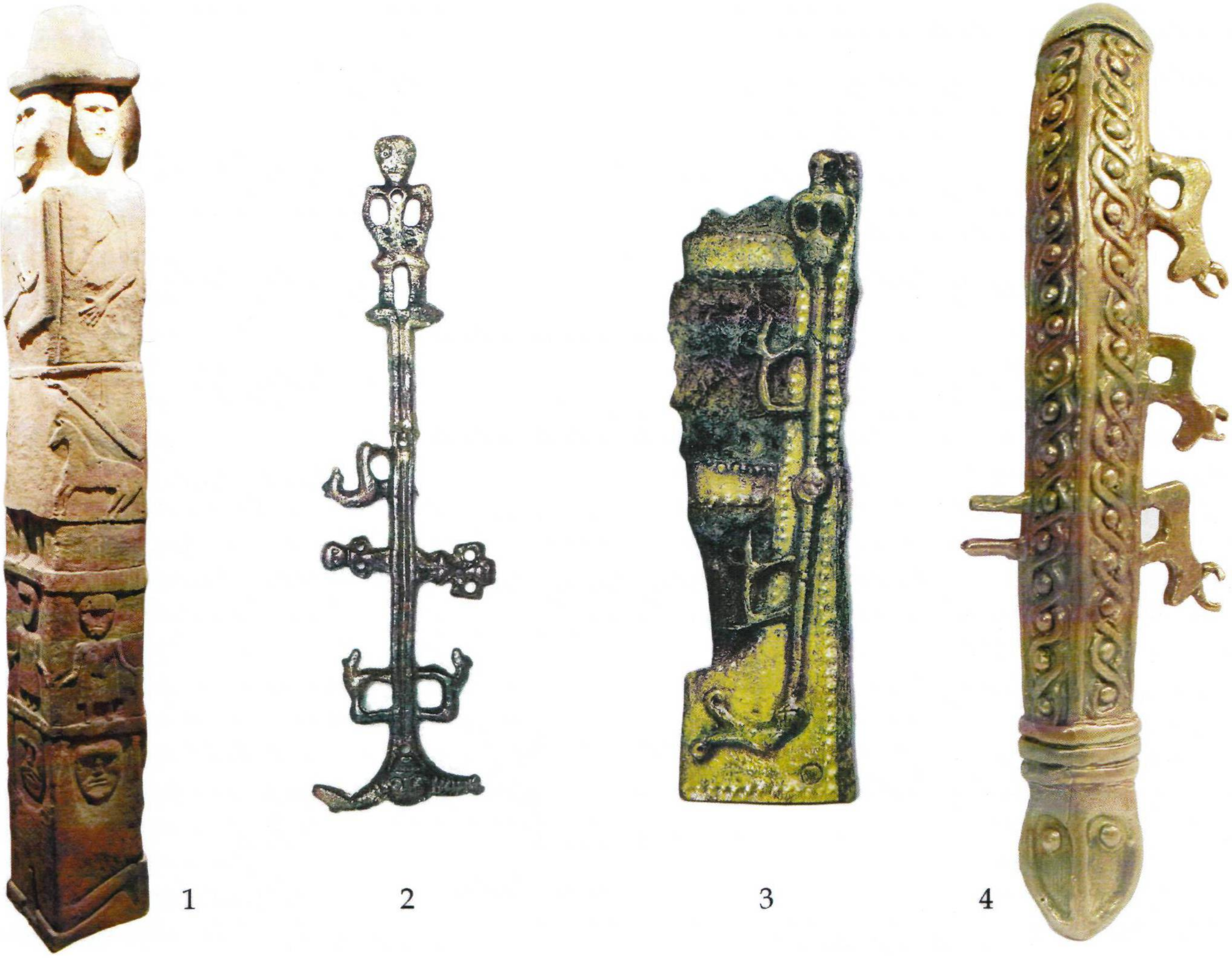

Fig. 2.24. Iconographic representations of the Slavic cosmos? 1 – Sventovit from Zbrucz. Photo by Leszek Gardeła. 2 – Decorated knife fitting from Oldenburg. Reproduced after Gabriel 2000, p. 139. 3 – Knife scabbard from Ostrów Lednicki. Reproduced after Kaszubkiewicz, Wrzesiński, Górecki, Tabaka 2002. 4 – Replica of one of the Lutomiersk spurs made by Krystyna 'Mojmira' Łopata from Kram Szepczące Kruki. Photo by Leszek Gardeła.

of a Slavic god named Triglav (*Trigelawo*) which allegedly stood in the Pomeranian town of Stettin (today's Szczecin in Poland):

> Stettin, their most extensive town, which was larger than Julin, included three hills in its circuit. The middle one of these, which was also the highest, was dedicated to Triglav, the chief god of the pagans; its image had a triple head and its eyes and lips were covered with a golden diadem. The idol priests declared that their chief god had three heads because it had charge of three kingdoms, namely, heaven, earth and the lower regions, and that its face was covered with a diadem so that it might pretend not to see the faults of men, and might keep silence.[225]

Some further details about the statue of Triglav and the temple in which it stood are also given in the chronicle of Herbordus.[226] Herbordus remarks that the statue was destroyed by St. Otto, who cut off its heads and sent them to Rome. Although these sources are very laconic, they allow to infer that the Pomeranian Slavs seem to have believed in a tri-partite division of the cosmos. This idea corresponds very well with the iconographic finds discussed above (the Zbrucz statue, knife scabbards and spurs).

Apart from the brief accounts recorded in medieval texts, some details about the idea of the Slavic afterlife are preserved in the works of ethnographers who documented the life of Slavic folk in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It must be emphasised, however, that the information collected by ethnographers is often patchy or inconsistent and refers to various different areas in the Slavic world.[227] Because of the vast chronological and geographical distribution of these accounts, it is extremely difficult to use them in attempts to reconstruct a consistent picture of pre-Christian worldviews and beliefs among the early medieval Slavs.

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[225] Ebbo, *Ebbonis vita Ottonis*; Translation after Robinson 1920, p. 110.

[226] The account is quoted and discussed in Labuda 2003, pp. 173–174. See also remarks in Gieysztor 2006, pp. 149–151.

Despite all these methodological problems, in the following sections I have tried to amalgamate information about the Slavic Otherworld(s), which I have drawn from various publications and archival sources. What follows, therefore, is only a very hypothetical reconstruction; we cannot know for certain whether (or to what extent) it actually reflects the worldviews of the Slavs from the early medieval period.

Nawia and Naw

In a range of studies on Slavic pre-Christian religion(s), many of which rely heavily on ethnographic or linguistic evidence, we find some attempts to describe how the pagan Slavs may have imagined the Otherworld(s) to be.[228] A word which is often debated in discussions on Slavic eschatological beliefs is *Nawia*.[229] We encounter it mainly in textual sources from Eastern Europe, where it seems to have referred to the world of the dead. Regrettably, we do not have any further information about where this Otherworld was located (in the sense of mythical geography) or what exactly it was like.

Interestingly, in various Slavic languages the word *naw/nav* and its variants are also associated with demonological beliefs,[230] an observation which can provide some further hints. Jerzy Strzelczyk[231] writes that the word *naw* (Polish nominative singular *naw* or *nawka*; nominative plural *nawie*) referred to demons who came into existence as a result of untimely or tragic death (e.g. miscarried children or those that had died before being baptised), but it could also be used to describe deceased unmarried girls, sorcerers, criminals and victims of murder. In his comprehensive study on Slavic religion, Andrzej Szyjewski[232] has provided a detailed list of different supernatural creatures whose names allude to the word *nav/naw* and these include, for example, *nawki*, later known as *mawki* or *majki*. The demons known as *naw* were regarded as malevolent beings who could threaten living people and who envied their life. Could *Nawia* therefore have been an otherworld for those who died a bad death? This interpretation is perhaps possible. On the other hand, one Bohemian chronicle from the fourteenth century known as *Dalimilova kronika* contains the interesting detail that king Krak was supposed to go to *Navia* after his death – which was not a 'bad' one.[233]

Both Jerzy Strzelczyk[234] and Stanisław Bylina[235] have also suggested that the word *naw* may be associated with the pagan deity of death known as Nyja, who is mentioned in *Historia Polonica* by Wincenty Kadłubek from the fifteenth century.[236] According to Wincenty Kadłubek, Nyja (equated in his account with the Greek god Pluto) was considered by the Slavs to be the deity of the underworld and a protector of human souls. He writes that the Slavs prayed to Nyja to ask for the provision of a good place in the Otherworld. Moreover, a special temple dedicated to Nyja was built in the town of Gniezno (in today's Greater Poland) and 'pilgrims' from different parts of the Polish lands came to visit it. Although Kadłubek's descriptions of Slavic pagan beliefs are often regarded as problematic and questionable, Strzelczyk[237] argues that Nyja may actually have been a genuine pagan deity. From a linguistic point of view, the name Nyja can potentially be related to contemporary Polish verbs like *niknąć* (to disappear) or *nędznieć* (to be in misery), and this corresponds rather well with the deity's association with dying and death.[238] In Krzysztof Tomasz Witczak's opinion,[239] Nyja may be the Polish equivalent of the Greek goddess Enyo. Unfortunately, nothing more is known about this deity and he/she does not appear in any other medieval sources.

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[227] For a valuable overview of sources referring to Slavic folklore and beliefs, see Moszyński 1967.

[228] For most recent debates on these notions, see Kajkowski 2015a; 2015b; Wawrzeniuk 2016, pp. 165–242.

[229] Bylina 1992, p. 15; 1995; Szyjewski 2003, pp. 77–79.

[230] Kajkowski 2015a, p. 270.

[231] Strzelczyk 2007, pp. 134–135.

[232] Szyjewski 2003, p. 176.

[233] Wawrzeniuk 2016, p. 167.

[234] Strzelczyk 2007, pp. 134–135.

[235] Bylina 1992, p. 15.

[236] For a Polish translation of Kadłubek's chronicle, see Kürbis 1996.

[237] Strzelczyk 2007, p. 138.

[238] Strzelczyk 2007, p. 138.

[239] Witczak 1994, pp. 123–132.

Wyraj, Raj, Irij

In his study on Slavic beliefs, in addition to debating the notion of *Nawia*, Szyjewski[240] has argued that the Slavs initially had only one Otherworld, which surrounded the human realm and was separated from it by water. This Otherworld was known as *Wyraj*, *Raj* or *Irij*.[241] Interestingly, not only people ventured there after death, but also different kinds of animals. Apparently, there was also a special *Wyraj* dedicated only to snakes, cuckoos, swallows, larks, jackdaws and crows. According to Szyjewski,[242] *Wyraj* was imagined as a garden surrounded by an iron fence with a gate that could not be passed by the living.

Szyjewski's views have been recently expanded by Kajkowski,[243] who has argued that the Slavic Otherworld could be imagined as an island, i.e. a place physically and conceptually separated from the mainland by water. This idea is particularly sound, because in some Slavic areas (especially among the Eastern Slavs) there was a mortuary custom which involved placing special wooden planks over various waterways (usually rivers) to enable the souls of recently deceased people a safe passage to the Otherworld.[244] There is also evidence for the creation of special pastries[245] which resembled bridges[246] enabling the souls of the dead to pass to the 'other side'. The assumption that the road to the Slavic Otherworld led through water[247] also finds considerable support from Polish archaeological materials, especially because some cemeteries were located on the opposite side of the river from where the settlement was and because some of the dead were inhumed in dugout boats.[248]

One Otherworld or more?

The wide variety of terms used for describing the Otherworld(s), such as *Nawia*, *Wyraj*, *Raj*, *Irij*, may reflect either the existence of several different realms of the dead or regional differences in how one and the same otherworldly place was named. Unfortunately, the available sources lack specific details regarding the actual journey to the Otherworld(s); we may only assume that it could be reached by souls of the dead and certain types of animals, such as snakes or birds (we might perhaps speculate that these animals were also some incarnation of the human soul). As for the gods who presided over these otherworldly domains, the only candidates are Nyja and the god Triglav. The latter, known as Weles in East Slavic sources, is sometimes described as a guardian of the Otherworld.[249]

As I have mentioned several times already, due to the scarcity of textual evidence, scholars tend to build a picture of the Slavic Otherworld(s) by drawing on and combining examples from different time periods and geographical areas. Such an approach can lead to the conclusion that there existed some coherent, or even orthodox, worldview among the early Slavs. However, recent work on other early medieval societies, for example the Viking Age Scandinavians, demonstrates that pre-Christian beliefs varied considerably on both the macro- and the micro-scale. In a thought-provoking study, Jens Peter Schjødt[250] has recently observed that Old Norse 'religion' is characterised by several types of diversity: chronological, geographical, social and cognitive. It seems safe to assume that a similar diversity of beliefs and ritual practices was also an inherent feature of Slavic paganism. Just like the Scandinavians, the Slavs may have worshipped different gods and imagined their Otherworld(s) in various ways depending on the region, period in time, and individual preference. There may also have been different gods for members of different social strata. Nevertheless, despite the assumed diversity of pagan beliefs, it is still possible to trace more general patterns – this is what I have attempted to do in the sections above.

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[240] Szyjewski 2003, p. 78.

[241] On *Wyraj, Raj, Irij* see also Kajkowski 2015a, p. 271. According to Bylina 1992, p. 15, another term which also refers to the Otherworld, but which is found only in Russian sources, is *nevedomaja strana* (Eng. the unknown side/place). On this notion, see also Teterycz-Puzio 2009, p. 213.

[242] Szyjewski 2003, p. 77.

[243] Kajkowski 2015a, pp. 271–277.

[244] Kajkowski 2015a, p. 272.

[245] Kajkowski 2015a, p. 272.

[246] On the symbolism of bridges among the Slavs see, for example, Chudziak 2015, p. 41.

[247] On the symbolic meanings of waterways and islands among Pomeranian Slavs see, for example, Buko 2011, pp. 312–314; Chudziak 2015.

[248] Kajkowski 2016b.

[249] On Weles in East Slavic sources, see the important work of Uspieński 1985.

[250] Schjødt 2009.

4. CONCLUSIONS

In this chapter I have tried to reconstruct some aspects of Slavic beliefs regarding the Otherworld(s). An overview of various funerary traditions in different regions of Poland has shown that, in the period spanning the ninth to thirteenth centuries, there were various ways of treating the dead. The oldest practices involved cremation – the dead were placed on wooden pyres in the company of objects and occasionally animals too. Cremations were performed among the Slavs in Poland at least until the late tenth century and began to cease after the conversion.

Although inhumation became the dominant funerary practice after the introduction of Christianity in Polish lands, it took a relatively long time to eradicate the old custom of burying the dead with grave goods. A survey of inhumation graves in different areas of Poland shows remarkable diversity in both the internal and external appearance of graves. The dead could be buried in grave pits either without any container for the body, or in coffins, chamber graves and even dugout boats. These different forms of burials and containers for the body may potentially tell us something about how the *post-mortem* existence was imagined. Perhaps burials in chamber graves were intended to create a special home for the dead, conceptually located between this world and the next? We know that some chamber graves could be visited by members of the family and that their construction would allow for different forms of interaction with the dead. Occasional burials in dugout boats may potentially represent a belief that the deceased had to cross a river or lake to get to their final destination in the Otherworld. This corresponds well with folkloristic materials which imply that the Otherworld was imagined as an island.

In the following part of this chapter, I have discussed the possible symbolic meanings and applications of the different objects deposited with the dead. I have shown that, although it is very difficult to interpret what these items may have meant and what role they played in funerary contexts, one thing is clear – they were not merely markers of the status or profession of the deceased, but must have held a plethora of special meanings.

An interdisciplinary analysis of iconographical materials and textual sources from the Middle Ages implies that the Slavs believed in a tripartite division of the cosmos, comprising the sky/heaven, earth and underworld. The otherworldly domains were governed by gods with opposing characteristics such as Sventovit/Perun and Triglav/Weles. I have argued that some of these cosmological ideas may have been visually expressed in different types of objects, such as the Zbrucz statue, the zoomorphic and anthropomorphic knife scabbards, and the copper alloy spurs.

Studies on mortuary practices in early medieval Poland have come a long way since the first decades of the twentieth century when the main focus was on collecting the available material evidence. Today, after over one hundred years of research on early medieval cemeteries, we can move forward and beyond the culture-historical tendencies that characterised earlier scholarship. It is with this new perspective in mind that we should also approach the problem of atypical burials, which forms the main topic of this book, and to which we shall now devote our full attention.

CHAPTER 3
THE SEARCH FOR VAMPIRES IN POLAND: HISTORIES, CONTROVERSIES, AND REEVALUATIONS

Among the most widely debated topics in Polish media in June 2013 was that of an alleged 'vampire cemetery' discovered at Dworcowa Street in Gliwice in Silesia. The site was found during rescue excavations which preceded the building of a new motorway cutting through the city.[1] It appears to have been a relatively small cemetery.[2] What was striking about it, however, was that many of the deceased had been buried with their heads cut off and placed at their feet. Immediately after discovery – and while the site was still being excavated – visually striking photographs and videos of these well-preserved but headless human remains appeared in mainstream media, and soon news about them spread widely around the world, from Poland to as far as South America. The highly problematic label 'vampire cemetery' was enthusiastically used in numerous press releases and led the general public to believe that medieval and early modern Poland was utterly saturated with the fear of animated corpses rising from their graves to haunt and hurt the living (**Fig. 3.1**). Although alternative opinions on the meanings of burials from Gliwice had been proposed by some specialists (including myself), they were all overshadowed by the more sensationalist views favouring the 'vampiric' interpretation.[3] The strong possibility that, instead of being a 'vampire cemetery', the site at Gliwice had served as a special place for the execution and burial of criminals appeared much less attractive for journalists commenting on the excavations.[4]

The prevailing trend of interpreting unusual graves as belonging to 'vampires' did not begin with the excavations in Gliwice, however. In fact, its origin may be traced to the mid-twentieth century. This chapter will explore the complicated and often controversial history of research and reception of early and late medieval atypical burials in Poland. In particular, it will seek to demonstrate how and under what influences problematic interpretations have developed over time and how they have affected the field of medieval archaeology.[5]

1. A HISTORY OF RESEARCH ON ATYPICAL BURIALS IN POLAND

As we have seen in Chapter 2, funerary archaeology and various aspects of death and dying started to attract the interest of Polish ethnographers, antiquarians and early archaeologists already in the nineteenth century. However, we may infer from the available archival materials and academic literature that the first records of archaeological discoveries of atypical burials in Poland come from the beginning of the twentieth century. The

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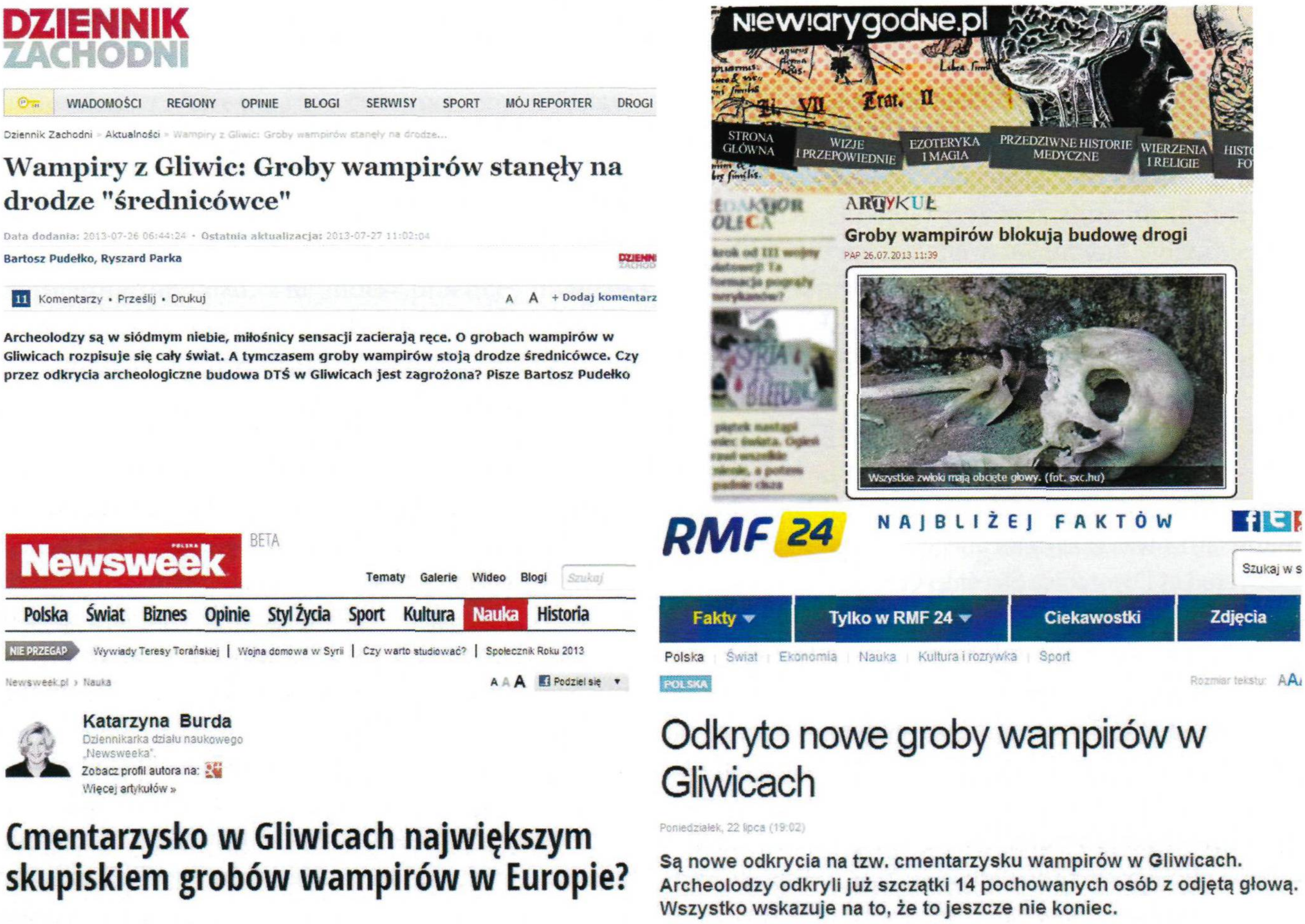
[1] Rapid transformations of Polish infrastructure and the building of new roads and motorways have made it necessary to conduct extensive rescue excavations in various parts of the country. The scale of some of these rescue excavation campaigns is without precedent and has led to the discovery of numerous new archaeological sites. Many of the discoveries that have been made so far are spectacular and have significantly contributed to our understanding of Poland's past. However, the speed and pressure under which some of these excavations are being conducted sometimes has a very negative effect on the quality of fieldwork and subsequent publication of the recovered materials. For various opinions on large-scale rescue excavation projects see, for example, Kukawka 2004; Czopek 2011.

[2] A total of 41 graves was found in 2013. See Obtułowicz, Pokutta 2014 for further details.

[3] Obtułowicz, Pokutta 2014; Gardeła 2015a.

[4] See critique in Gardeła 2015a.

[5] Some sections of this chapter appeared in 2015 in my paper published in *Lund Archaeological Review* (Gardeła 2015a). For the purposes of this book they have been fully revised and substantially expanded.


DZIENNIK ZACHODNI
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Dziennik Zachodni » Aktualności » Wampiry z Gliwic: Groby wampirów stanęły na drodze...

Wampiry z Gliwic: Groby wampirów stanęły na drodze "średnicówce"

Data dodania: 2013-07-26 06:44:24 • Ostatnia aktualizacja: 2013-07-27 11:02:04

Bartosz Pudełko, Ryszard Parka

11 Komentarzy • Prześlij • Drukuj
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Archeolodzy są w siódmym niebie, miłośnicy sensacji zacierają ręce. O grobach wampirów w Gliwicach rozpisuje się cały świat. A tymczasem groby wampirów stoją drodze średnicówce. Czy przez odkrycia archeologiczne budowa DTŚ w Gliwicach jest zagrożona? Pisze Bartosz Pudełko

Niewiarygodne.pl
STRONA GŁÓWNA
WIZJE I PRZEPOWIEDNIE
EZOTERYKA I MAGIA
PRZEDZIWNE HISTORIE MEDYCZNE
WIERZENIA I RELIGIE
ARTYKUŁ

Groby wampirów blokują budowę drogi

PAP 26.07.2013 11:39

Wszystkie zwłoki mają obcięte głowy. (fot. sxc.hu)

Newsweek POLSKA BETA
Tematy Galerie Wideo Blogi Szukaj
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Katarzyna Burda
Dziennikarka działu naukowego „Newsweeka".
Zobacz profil autora na:
Więcej artykułów »

Cmentarzysko w Gliwicach największym skupiskiem grobów wampirów w Europie?

RMF 24 NAJBLIŻEJ FAKTÓW
Szukaj w s
Fakty Tylko w RMF 24 Ciekawostki Zdjęcia
Polska Świat Ekonomia Nauka Kultura i rozrywka Sport
POLSKA
Rozmiar tekstu: AA

Odkryto nowe groby wampirów w Gliwicach

Poniedziałek, 22 lipca (19:02)

Są nowe odkrycia na tzw. cmentarzysku wampirów w Gliwicach. Archeolodzy odkryli już szczątki 14 pochowanych osób z odjętą głową. Wszystko wskazuje na to, że to jeszcze nie koniec.

Fig. 3.1. Atypical burials from Gliwice, Poland as understood by the media in 2013. The headline from Dziennik Zachodni says 'Vampires from Gliwice: Vampire graves are blocking the highway'. The headline from Newsweek says 'The cemetery at Gliwice has the largest concentration of vampire graves in Europe?'. The headline from Niewiarygodne.pl says 'Vampire graves are blocking the construction of the road'. The headline from RMF24 says 'New vampire graves discovered at Gliwice'.

early publications from the 1930s and 1960s did not go into great detail about these findings and at that time there were practically no attempts to place unusual mortuary phenomena into a wider comparative context. Many of the early publications lacked plans, photographs or illustrations and were limited to providing rather laconic free-text descriptions of the alignment of bodies and the grave goods that accompanied them. Only occasionally were excavation reports supplemented by osteological analyses; in most instances the sex and age of the deceased were determined solely on the basis of the types of objects buried with the dead (i.e. weapons were believed to indicate men and jewellery to indicate women). Despite various shortcomings, especially with regard to the rudimentary quality of field documentation, these early discoveries cannot be completely rejected in current research on unusual funerary phenomena in early medieval Poland.

In the sections below, by adopting a historiographical approach, we shall examine how various Polish scholars have approached the problem of atypical burials in their publications. The discussion will focus only on inhumations, since they are the only types of graves from early medieval Poland that tend to display deviant characteristics. Although it is indeed possible that some deviant practices were conducted during cremation burials as well, these acts are invisible for us in today's archaeological record.

1930s–1960s: First discoveries of early medieval atypical burials in Poland

Grave no. 2 from Gwiazdowo in Greater Poland is among the earliest discoveries of early medieval atypical burials.[6] It was first published by Zdzisław Rajewski in 1937 and according to his description included the skeletal remains of a young woman who had been buried in a prone position and aligned S-N with her face directed towards the west. Interestingly, the woman had three head adornments made of lead (so-called 'temple-rings', a typical Slavic female ornament) as well as a bronze finger-ring and another ring made of silver. Her grave also included a knife in a leather scabbard decorated with bronze foil. Apart from several black-and-white illustrations of the finds, no drawing or photograph of this grave has ever been published. This is very unfortunate, since it is one of very few prone burials of females discovered in Poland and the only one with such lavish furnishings (other prone female burials are known from Adolfin in Kuyavia, Stary Zamek in Silesia and Świelubie in Pomerania – see Chapter 4 for a detailed discussion). Despite the fact that the grave from Gwiazdowo displayed very peculiar and unique characteristics, Rajewski refrained from providing any further comments about it. This lack of deeper interest in unusual mortuary phenomena is a reflection of the general spirit of early twentieth-century Polish archaeology which, in accordance with culture-historical trends of that time, focused predominantly on description and cultural classification of the discovered material and almost completely ignored considerations of past beliefs and ritual practices.[7]

Wider interest in early medieval deviant burials and some attempts to interpret them began to appear in the 1950s, especially in the publications of scholars such as Jerzy Gąssowski[8] and Bonifacy Zielonka.[9] Gąssowski was actually the first Polish archaeologist to ever use the word 'vampire' in connection with an early medieval grave. The grave in question was discovered in an early medieval cemetery at Radom in Masovia and contained the skeletal remains of an adult man who had been buried on his left side (almost in a prone position) with his face directed towards the ground (**Fig. 3.2**). Upon burial, the body was additionally covered with as many as 16 medium-sized and large stones, each weighing around 20–30kg. In his article, Gąssowski speculated about the reasons which may have led to such an unusual form of interment and suggested that these complex and laborious burial rituals could have been intended to protect the living society against a 'vampire'.[10] Alternatively, in his view, the atypical grave from Radom may have been that of a convict.[11] Gąssowski did not expand these interpretations any further in his publication, however.

Another interesting discovery of an early medieval atypical grave was made at Buczek in Central Poland during excavations undertaken by archaeologists from Łódź in 1949–1950.[12] The cemetery at Buczek was relatively small and altogether fourteen graves were revealed. It is estimated that the site could not have had more than thirty graves in total, which implies that it was a burial place for a small, local community and that it was used for only a relatively short period of time.[13] All graves were inhumations with the deceased buried in a supine position. Several graves of men contained weapons (e.g. spears, axes) and riding equipment, while female graves included jewellery, knives and vessels made of clay and wood. Some graves contained stones in their external or internal structures. No graves of children were found.[14] Based on the types of finds that accompanied the dead, the site has been dated to the eleventh century. Of particular interest at Buczek is grave 8, which belonged to a man who was 25–35 years old at the time of death. He was buried in a supine position and upon discovery his remains were poorly preserved (**Fig. 3.3**). The grave did not contain any objects, but on the man's chest lay a charred wooden stake, which was 17cm long.[15] Interestingly, the grave was located at some distance from other graves at the site and close to what has been interpreted as the remains of an open fireplace.[16] Waldemar Chmielewski,

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[6] Rajewski 1937, pp. 33, 54, 69.

[7] On culture-historical archaeology, see Trigger 2009, pp. 211–313.

[8] Gąssowski 1950.

[9] Zielonka 1957; 1958.

[10] Gąssowski 1950, p. 322.

[11] Gąssowski 1950, p. 322.

[12] Chmielewski 1950.

[13] Kamińska 1956, p. 110.

[14] Kamińska 1956, p. 111.

[15] Chmielewski 1950, p. 101.

[16] Open fireplaces at early medieval cemeteries in Poland are not unusual, but their purpose is unclear. Perhaps they served some special role during funerary ceremonies or were used by people who visited cemeteries to commemorate their dead on other occasions. See Kamińska 1956, pp. 110–111.

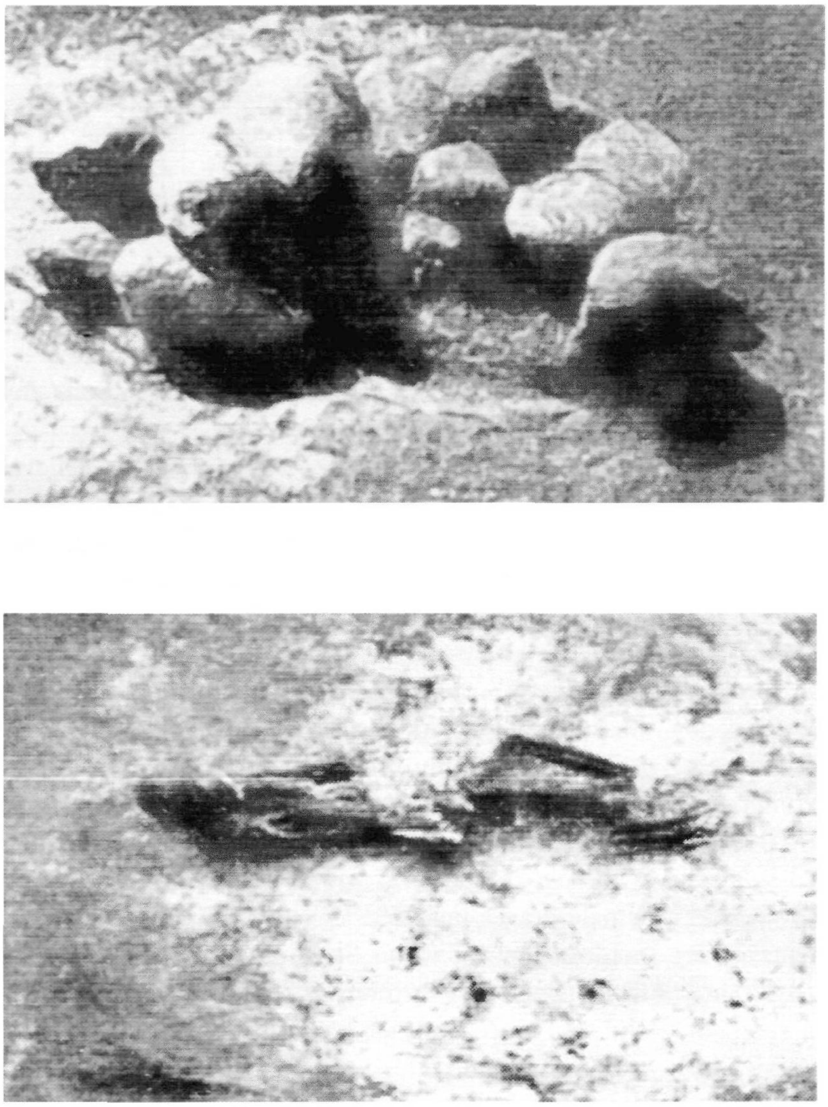

Fig. 3.2. Grave 47 from Radom. After Żydok 2004, p. 59.

who first published this grave in 1950 in the popular journal *Z Otchłani Wieków*, thought that it belonged to someone who the local community disliked or feared. In 1956, Janina Kamińska similarly argued that the unusual location of the grave and the stake on/in the man's chest together imply that he was considered by the local society to be someone negative.[17] To further substantiate her view, she referred to the work of the famous Polish ethnographer Kazimierz Moszyński and cited his descriptions of preventive measures against revenants which involved piercing the bodies of the dangerous dead with stakes to hold them down in their graves.[18] Consequently, Kamińska labelled grave 8 from Buczek as belonging to a revenant and twice in her article she referred to the buried man as *upiór*.[19] A new assessment of this grave has shown that the

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[17] Kamińska 1956, p. 105: 'Nieboszczyk umieszczony został poza rzędami grobów w pewnym od nich oddaleniu, w pobliżu ogniska, które mogło mieć jakiś związek z cmentarzyskiem. Zupełny brak wyposażenia grobowego i tkwiący w piersi kół wzbudzają podejrzenie, iż zmarłego starano się odsunąć od społeczności chowającej swych zmarłych na cmentarzysku, że był on źle widziany przez tę społeczność. Mogły tu odegrać rolę np. wierzenia. Pochowanego człowieka, od którego stroniono za życia, starano się unieszkodliwić po śmierci przez przygwożdżenie jego ciała kołem do ziemi' / 'The deceased was buried away from other graves, in the vicinity of a fireplace which may have been connected to the cemetery in some way. The complete lack of grave goods and the stake in the chest of the deceased suggest that an effort was made to separate him from other individuals buried in the cemetery and that he was perceived as someone negative. This may have been motivated by, for example, beliefs. The buried man, who had been disliked during his life, was annihilated by nailing him to the ground with a stake' (Translation by Leszek Gardeła).

[18] Kamińska 1956, pp. 106–107.

[19] Kamińska 1956, p. 111. On the term *upiór*, see Lecouteux 2010, pp. 74–75, 79–80.

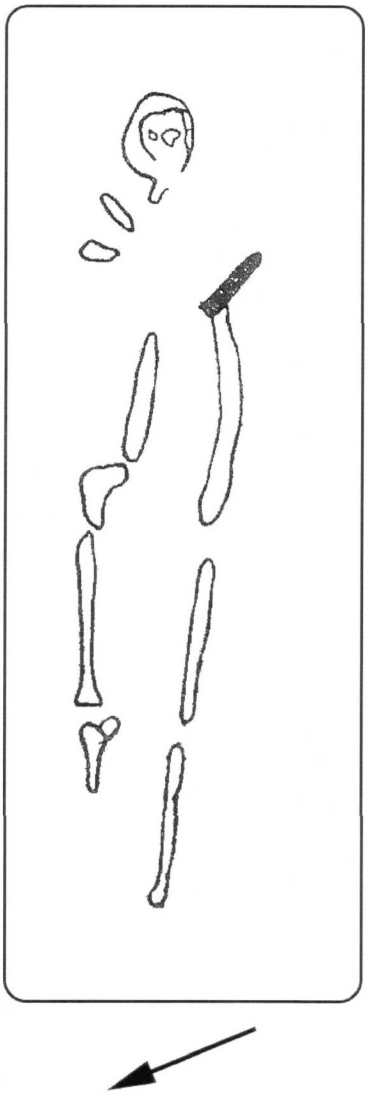

Fig. 3.3. Grave 8 from Buczek. Redrawn after Stanaszek 2016b, p. 8.

interpretation of the wooden stake as something that pierced the body is incorrect. Most likely the piece of wood served as part of a coffin or as a grave marker.[20]

In the late 1950s Bonifacy Zielonka discussed a number of early medieval deviant burials more extensively in two of his works, most notably in a popular paper published in the archaeological journal *Z Otchłani Wieków*.[21] In this short article from 1957, he described a range of graves which he had excavated in Bodzanowo and Adolfin in the region of Kuyavia in Central Poland (**Fig. 3.4** and **Fig. 3.5**).[22] Among the early medieval graves discovered at Adofin was the grave of a man whose head had been cut off and placed between his legs. Interestingly, Zielonka noted that, upon excavation, one of his physical workers called it the grave of a *strzyga* – in Polish ethnography this term has various meanings and can refer to a revenant or a person dealing with witchcraft.[23] It should be highlighted that Zielonka was the first Polish archaeologist who not only described atypical burials in far more detail than all of his predecessors, but also tried to interpret them in the context of ethnographic sources. His article cites a remarkable and previously unknown textual account called *Casus de strigis*.[24] This story takes place in 1674 in Lesser Poland. It concerns a rural community threatened by a man who has risen from his grave and become a bloodthirsty revenant. In order to put an end to his malevolence, a priest tells his people to reopen the grave and turn the body face down. Unfortunately, this does not solve the problem and the revenant continues to cause trouble. The grave is therefore dug up again and the living dead is beheaded. Although the date of this account is very early, the details it contains are not unusual – similar stories about dealing with malevolent revenants are known from various parts of the world and are also recorded in the works of various Polish folklorists which we shall examine more closely further below.[25] Accounts such as *Casus de strigis* imply that a belief in the living dead prevailed in some regions of Poland until as late as the nineteenth or even twentieth century. One remarkable example of the longevity of the belief in revenants among the Poles is an article from *Süddeutsche Zeitung* which describes an actual event that took place on 10 January 1973:

> Demetrius Myiciura, a fifty-six year-old Polish man living in London, had a fear of vampires bordering on panic, and it brought about his own death. A medical expert noted that Myiciura had suffocated on a garlic clove he kept in his mouth at night. Large quantities of garlic, salt, and pepper found in his room were intended as protection against vampires.[26]

Returning to the works of Bonifacy Zielonka, it is important to emphasise here that although he seems to have had a lively interest in atypical burials and Slavic folklore, in his articles he never labelled them as belonging to 'vampires' specifically.

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[20] Wajda 2012, p. 206.

[21] Zielonka 1957; 1958.

[22] Zielonka 1957.

[23] For more details about the meaning of name *strzyga*, see Kolczyński 2003; Lecouteux 2010, pp. 51, 82–83; Stanaszek 2016a.

[24] Zielonka 1957, pp. 21–22; see also Stanaszek 1998, p. 24.

[25] See, for example, Moszyński 1967; Pełka 1987; Bylina 1992; 1999; Stanaszek 2016a.

[26] Cited after Lecouteux, p. 15.

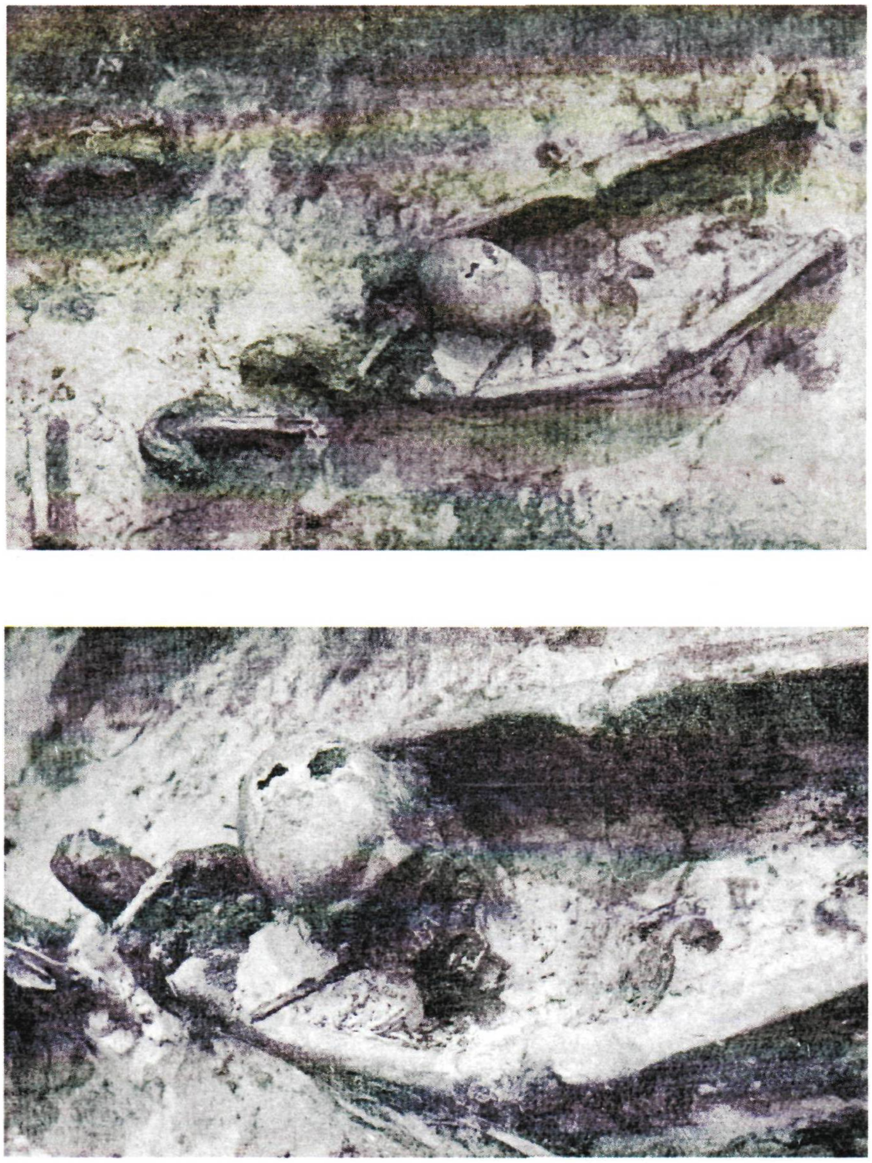

Fig. 3.4. Grave from Adolfin belonging to a decapitated man. One of the physical workers present at the excavation interpreted it as a grave of a *strzyga*. After Zielonka 1957, pp. 22–23.

In the 1960s, during an intensified period of early medieval excavations as part of the large-scale 'Millennial Project',[27] archaeologists found further traces of mortuary behaviour that deviated considerably from the normative treatment of the dead. Among these discoveries were graves of people who had been buried in a prone position, covered with stones or beheaded. Other unusual practices were recorded as well, such as covering the bodies with clay, piercing them with stakes or other sharp objects etc. For many scholars such puzzling finds were very difficult to interpret and therefore they only mentioned them briefly in their publications, without attempting to offer any detailed comments. Some scholars completely avoided any such discussion.[28]

In 1962, Bonifacy Zielonka returned to the problem of revenants in a short article that presented the results of excavations in a medieval inhumation cemetery at Radziejów. Based on the finds that accompanied the dead, he dated the site between the thirteenth and seventeenth century. One of the graves held the remains of a decapitated man whose head had been placed between his legs (**Fig. 3.6**). As in the case of

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[27] As mentioned in Chapter 2, the 'Millennial Project' was a large-scale initiative involving extensive excavations of early medieval sites all around Poland. It formed part of the celebrations of the millennium of the Polish state.

[28] For example, in Leonard Pełka's 1960 popular book on pre-Christian beliefs in Poland entitled *U stóp słowiańskiego Parnasu* the problem of atypical burials is completely omitted. This negligence was pointed out in a very critical review of his work published by Bukowski 1961, p. 252.

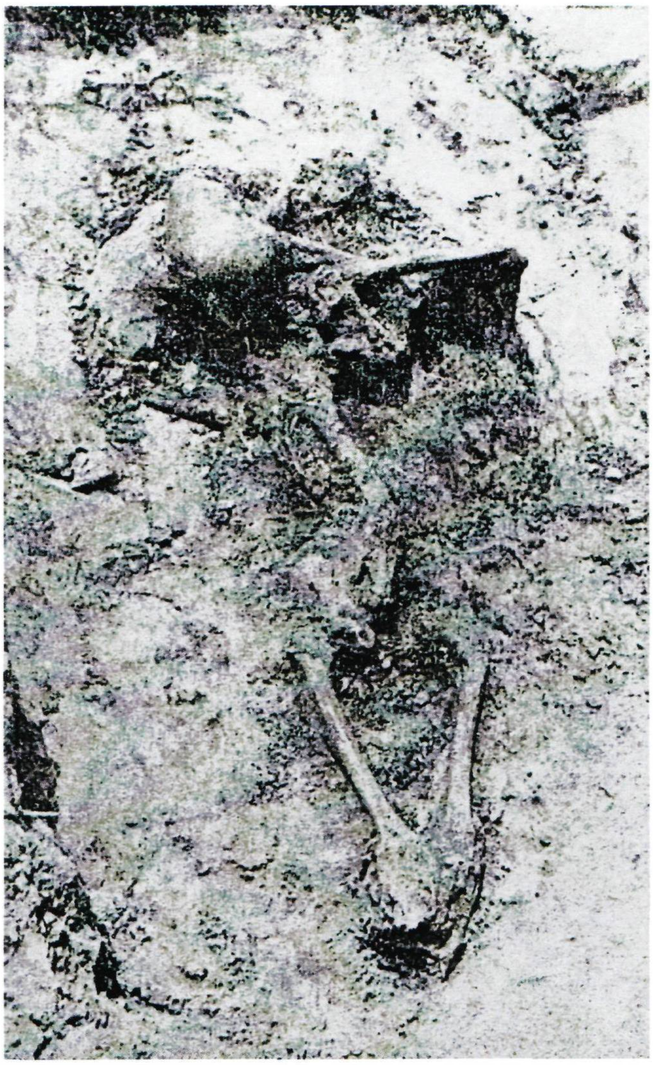

Fig. 3.5. Grave 2 from Adolfin in which an adult female was buried in a prone position. After Zielonka 1957, p. 21.

his previous interpretations of atypical burials from Adolfin, Zielonka suggested that this grave could be that of a *strzyga*. It is noteworthy, however, that he also considered the alternative possibility that the man was an executed criminal.[29]

One year later, in 1963, Eugeniusz Cnotliwy released a popular article about an early medieval cemetery located at Wzgórze Wisielców (Eng. Gallows Hill) at Wolin.[30] The site was partly excavated in the nineteenth century by German scholars and some additional fieldwork was conducted in its southern part in 1959. One of the most remarkable graves discovered there was that of a man who had been decapitated and buried headless in the grave pit, probably with his hands tied (**Fig. 3.7**). Upon excavation archaeologists found an oval trace of a decomposed wooden post between the man's legs and speculated that his missing head may have been attached to it. In his article, Cnotliwy reasonably argued that this was the grave of an executed criminal and that the name of the site, Wzgórze Wisielców, indicated that it had served as a place for executions. Due to the popular character of his article, Cnotliwy also allowed himself to speculate that the man may have been a pirate who attacked merchant ships or a person responsible for lighting fire beacons to guide incoming ships into the harbor, who, due to negligence, could have caused a naval accident for which he was punished and beheaded.[31]

Also, in a major monograph concerning another early medieval cemetery at Wolin known as Młynówka, Jerzy Wojtasik interpreted a number of atypical graves as displaying 'traces of magic practices' or as 'burials of criminals', but he refrained from providing any further comments.[32]

Late 1960s–1970s: Establishing the term 'anti-vampire burial'

Although in the 1960s atypical burials started to be noticed more frequently at early medieval sites in Poland, wider debates on their possible meanings rarely appeared in Polish archaeological publications. Worthy of note, however, is an edited collection of papers entitled *Religia pogańskich Słowian* (Eng. *Religion of the Pagan Slavs*) which explores aspects of Slavic pre-Christian religion in the light of archaeology, history and other disciplines in the remit of the humanities.[33] The volume was published in 1968, as a result of an interdisciplinary conference held at Muzeum Świętokrzyskie (Eng. Świętokrzyskie Museum) in Kielce on 14–15 February 1967, and was organised in cooperation with the Institute of History of Material Culture (Polish Academy of Sciences) and the Board of Museums and Protection of Monuments (Ministry of Arts and Culture).[34] Gathering many prominent scholars representing various academic institutions in Poland, it was in fact the first conference after the Second World War that was specifically devoted to pre-

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[29] Zielonka 1962, p. 364.

[30] Cnotliwy 1963.

[31] Cnotliwy 1963, p. 235.

[32] See, for example, Wojtasik 1968, pp. 207–208.

[33] Oborny, Erber, Kuczyński, Paprocki 1968.

[34] Although the volume is published in Polish, it contains extensive summaries in English and Russian.

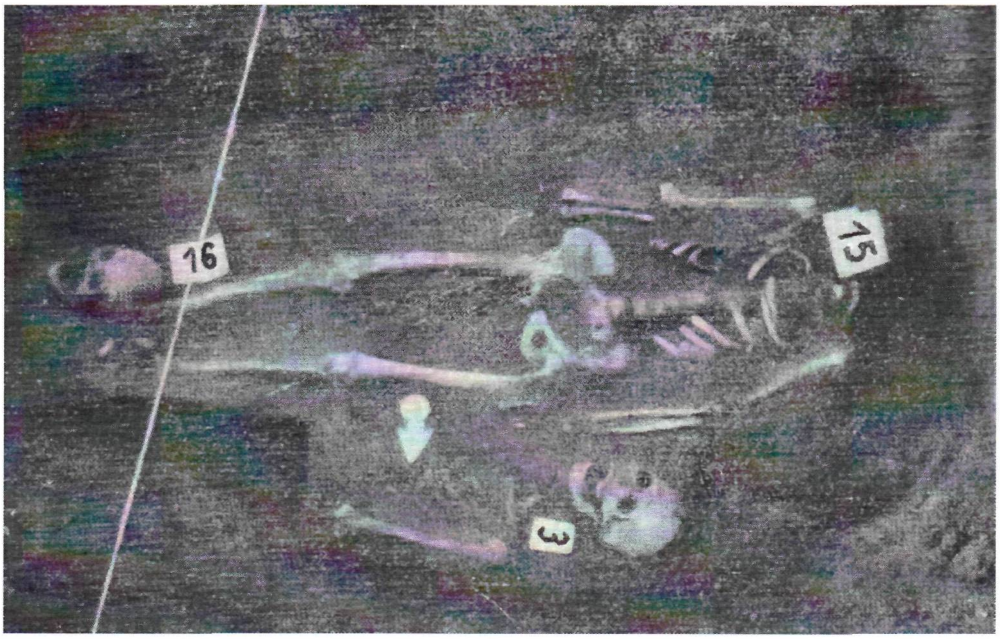

Fig. 3.6. Grave from Radziejów. An allegedly decapitated man. After Zielonka 1962, p. 362.

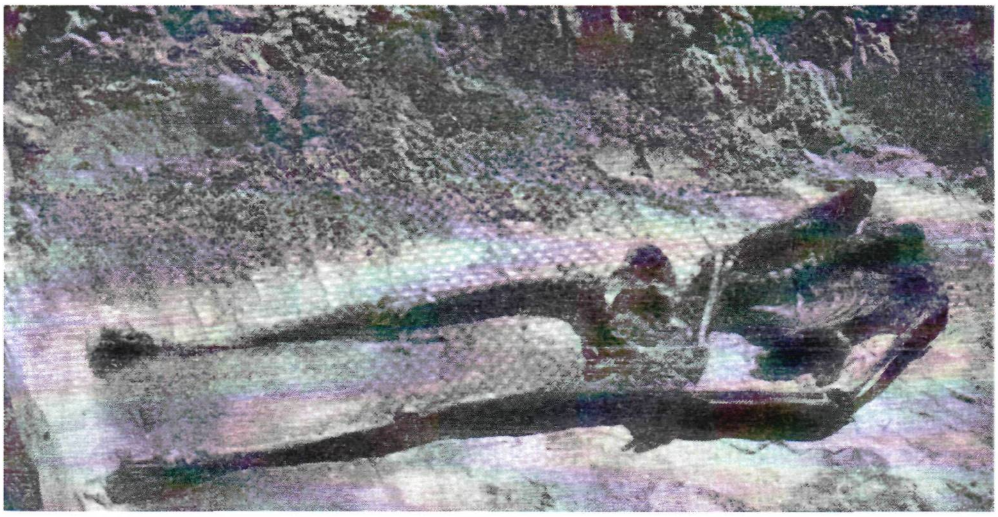

Fig. 3.7. Grave from Wzgórze Wisielców. A decapitated man with a post between his legs. After Cnotliwy 1963, p. 234.

Christian religion. The primary aim of this important event was not to arrive at a comprehensive picture of Slavic paganism, but rather to instigate discussion and create an opportunity to confront various scholarly ideas.[35] The notion of the living dead was marginal to the debates but it was nonetheless briefly mentioned by Stanisław Urbańczyk, a renowned linguist and historian of religion, in a short paragraph of his paper concerning the possibilities of reconstructing Slavic beliefs.[36] Other articles in the volume focused on possible pre-Christian cult sites in Poland and examined various methodological issues connected with their research. One important aspect of this publication is that it contains an extensive transcript of the discussions held during the conference in Kielce, which now serves as valuable historiographic material on theoretical and methodological trends in the field of archaeological study of religion in Poland in the 1960s.

Another publication from that time which provided a range of interpretations of atypical burial phenomena is that of an early medieval cemetery at Złota Pińczowska in Świętokrzyskie Voivodeship. Among several unusual graves discovered there was grave no. 3, which contained the skeletal remains of an adult man who had been buried on his side with flexed legs and a knife stuck in his spine (**Fig. 3.8**).[37] The author of the report, Maria Miśkiewicz, speculated that the man may have been buried with his body tied up and that this practice could

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[35] Oborny 1968, p. 9.

[36] Urbańczyk 1968, p. 39.

[37] Miśkiewicz 1967, pp. 96, 98, 129. For further discussions on this grave, see Stanaszek 2016b, pp. 32–34.

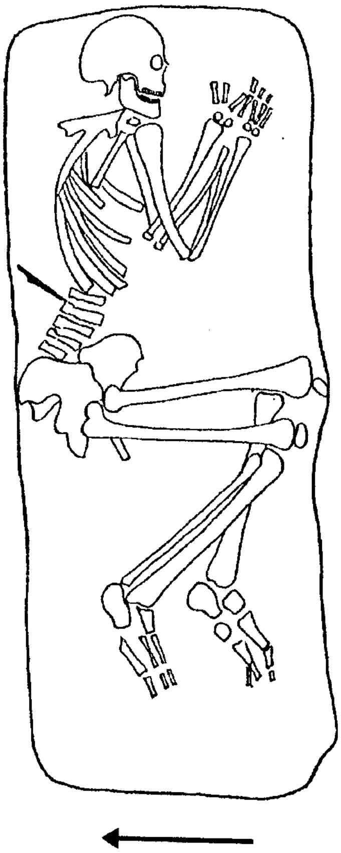

Fig. 3.8. Grave 3 from Złota Pińczowska. A man buried with a knife stuck in his spine. Reproduced after Miśkiewicz 1967, p. 98.

have reflected 'the belief in revenants' (she used the word *upiory*).[38] She also added that such an unusual manner of burial might have signalled fear of the 'revenge of the dead',[39] but without providing any further arguments or explanations for her claims. We shall return to her ideas and other interesting aspects of the cemetery at Złota Pińczowska in the further chapters of this book.

In 1968, only one year after the conference at Kielce, Małgorzata Kowalczyk published a book entitled *Wierzenia pogańskie za pierwszych Piastów* (Eng. *Pagan Beliefs in the Times of the First Piasts*). It is the first single-authored synthesis of archaeological finds associated with pre-Christian beliefs of the Slavs in early medieval Poland.[40] After an opening chapter which gives an overview of the current *Stand der Forschung*, Kowalczyk discusses Slavic paganism in the light of textual and ethnographic sources. This is followed by chapters devoted to material expressions of religious practices, including the cult of the dead, as well as a chapter that examines various small, portable objects, some of which may have served the role of amulets. Atypical funerary practices are mentioned on several occasions in Kowalczyk's book. She refers to archaeological discoveries of unusual burials from the cemeteries at Adolfin, Buczek, Radom, Kałdus and Końskie, and also to those found at settlement sites and in early towns like Gdańsk.[41] In the case of Gdańsk, she mentions an interesting grave containing a newborn child which was found under the floor of a house, and argues that similar practices were known among the ancient Greeks and Romans and may have been related to the widespread belief in household spirits.[42] Her study also devotes some attention to knives and other sharp objects occasionally found in funerary contexts which stand vertically or have been intentionally broken.[43] Kowalczyk's discussion on atypical burials was certainly an important step towards a better understanding of their significance. Although she saw them all as reflecting the fear of revenants, and even called them *groby upiorów* (Eng. graves of *upiory*), her work successfully synthesised the growing corpus of such findings and provided a good starting point for further debate. Following scholars like the aforementioned Bonifacy Zielonka, she also referred to textual sources, citing *Casus de strigis* as well as several other accounts dealing with revenants that had been published in the press in the nineteenth century, for example in *Kuryer Codzienny* in 1869 and in *Tydzień* in 1895.

A considerable interpretative breakthrough in the archaeological understanding of early medieval atypical burials started to take form in the early 1970s due to the release of Helena Zoll-Adamikowa's major monograph on inhumation graves in Lesser Poland.[44] Her authoritative work introduced the term *pochówek antywampiryczny* (Eng. anti-vampire burial) as a label for unusual funerary practices that took place in Polish cemeteries in the period between the eleventh and thirteenth centuries. Although from a source-critical perspective the label anti-vampire burial is extremely problematic (i.e. the word *vampire* was unknown among the Western Slavs until at least the seventeenth century), a careful reading of Zoll-Adamikowa's monograph implies that she was rather careful in applying it and did not consider every single grave that displayed atypical characteristics to be that of a potential revenant. It may be inferred from the tone of her discussion that, in a similar way to other scholars before her,[45] she considered the label 'vampire' to be a kind of umbrella term for denoting any kind of living dead or animated corpse. It must be noted, however, that she did not reference any of the standard works of vampirism and, judging from her bibliography, she seems to have been unaware of the important studies of Calmet,[46] Wright[47] and Summers.[48]

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[38] Miśkiewicz 1967, p. 129.

[39] Miśkiewicz 1967, p. 138.

[40] But see also two other popular works released in the late 1960s and early 1970s devoted to pre-Christian beliefs, each of which contains sections devoted specifically to the early medieval period – Kramarek 1968; Łuka 1973.

[41] Kowalczyk 1968, pp. 81–84, 122.

[42] Kowalczyk 1968, p. 122. For a detailed study of the belief in household spirits, see Lecouteux 2013.

[43] Kowalczyk 1968, pp. 122–123.

[44] Zoll-Adamikowa 1971.

An important innovation in approaches to unusual funerary evidence is exemplified by Zoll-Adamikowa's discussion on prone burials, which she argues, in contrast to previous Polish scholars, do not always have to signal the fear of revenants, but instead may belong to individuals who had died in a plague and were thrown into the grave pit during a hasty and careless burial. Furthermore, in Zoll-Adamikowa's view, partial cremation of the bones,[49] which is found in some early medieval inhumation graves in Poland, need not imply that someone wanted to burn a potential vampire, but could instead result from the individual's tragic death in a fire.

Despite Zoll-Adamikowa's reserved approach, the term anti-vampire burial – which today is generally, but not necessarily correctly, regarded as a synonym to what elsewhere in Europe is known as 'atypical', 'unusual', 'non-normative' or 'deviant burial'[50] – soon became widely accepted in early medieval funerary archaeology in Poland and remained practically unchallenged for over two decades following the publication of her monograph. The reasons for this probably resulted from Zoll-Adamikowa's prominent position as an academic and also from the fact that her study quickly became a cornerstone for all future works on early medieval funerary archaeology in Poland.

In 1971, Eleonora and Zdzisław Kaszewscy published their report on the important early medieval cemetery at Brześć Kujawski, which included a number of graves with unusual features. The site dates from the mid-eleventh to twelfth century and is located in Kuyavia in Central Poland, an area that lay beyond the scope of Zoll-Adamikowa's previous analyses. The cemetery at Brześć Kujawski comprised 152 graves, most of which were inhumations with the dead typically buried in a supine position and occasionally accompanied by various grave goods. Of particular interest is grave no. 43, in which a wooden stake was found on the deceased person's chest (**Fig. 3.9**).[51] Similar to the grave from Buczek discussed above, the stake was interpreted as something that pierced the alleged revenant's body and held him down. Another atypical grave from Brześć Kujawski (no. 164) belonged to an individual with tied limbs and, in Eleonora and Zdzisław Kaszewscy's opinion, this peculiar treatment of the corpse reflected a fear that the person would rise and hurt the living.[52] Interestingly, in their discussion of another atypical grave of a woman whose left hand had been cut off, they suggested that this injury may have resulted from some form of punishment.[53] They did not elaborate on these burials any further and it is fair to say that most of their ideas about the meanings of unusual funerary practices served simply as throwaway comments. It must be emphasised, however, that contrary to many other scholars, they acknowledged the existence of different types of atypical burials and tried to interpret each of them individually, instead of automatically labelling them all as representing the fear of vampires.

Apart from the limited range of studies mentioned above – especially those of Kowalczyk and Zoll-Adamikowa – there was hardly any deeper reflection on atypical burials in Polish archaeology in the 1960s–1970s. In 1973, Leon Jan Łuka, in his popular booklet entitled *Wierzenia pogańskie na Pomorzu Wschodnim w starożytności i średniowieczu* (Eng. *Pagan Beliefs in Eastern Pomerania in Prehistory and the Middle Ages*), briefly mentioned the idea of the living dead and gave examples of alleged anti-revenant practices from the Roman period and later times. He noted that fear of the dead was escalated even further if people had died a bad death, and that those who had drowned or been hanged or murdered were particularly prone to becoming revenants. Like some scholars before him, Łuka also cited an interesting textual account by Jan

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[45] Krumphanzlová 1961.

[46] Calmet 1746; 1751; 1759.

[47] Wright 2001[1914].

[48] Summers 2001[1961]; 2005[1929].

[49] For examples of inhumation graves with partially cremated human remains see, for example, Sikorski 2000; Porzeziński 2008.

[50] On terminological issues, see Stanaszek 2016a; Gardeła 2016c, pp. 109–113.

[51] Kaszewscy 1971, p. 425.

[52] Kaszewscy 1971, p. 426.

[53] Kaszewscy 1971, pp. 368, 426.

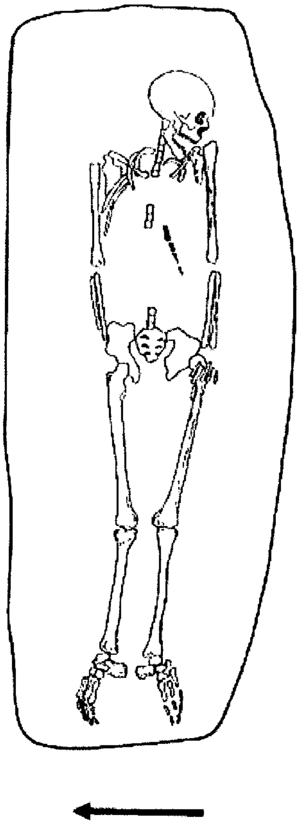

Fig. 3.9. Grave 43 from Brześć Kujawski interpreted as belonging to a man buried with a stake on his chest. Reproduced after Kaszewscy 1971, p. 405.

Bohomolec, which describes the fear of *upiory* in the eighteenth century and various apotropaic acts intended to lay them to rest (e.g. exhumation, decapitation and placing the head between the legs).[54]

The lack of wider debate on atypical burials was not only a matter of sweeping a difficult topic under the rug but also a reflection of the trends in archaeological research at that time. Before the 1990s in Poland, there was little interest in aspects of ritual, cult and religion in past societies and these issues remained on the fringes of mainstream debates, which focused predominantly on 'grand topics' such as ethnicity, migration, settlement or typological and functional classification of artefacts. It is possible to assume that for some scholars publishing on the problem of revenants in the early Middle Ages would have been regarded as unnecessary or even 'unscientific'. This situation began to gradually improve in the 1990s, with the development of processual and post-processual approaches to the past and a wider acknowledgement of anthropological theory and history of religion in Polish archaeology.[55]

1990s: First syntheses of early medieval atypical burials in Poland

In the late 1990s, over sixty years since the first recorded discoveries of early medieval atypical burials in Poland, these problematic finds were finally embraced in a more nuanced and interdisciplinary way by Łukasz Maurycy Stanaszek.[56] In a series of articles which culminated in 2000 with a Master's thesis entitled *Wampiryzm we wczesnym średniowieczu. Próba całościowej analizy problemu ze szczególnym uwzględnieniem obszaru Polski* (Eng. *Vampirism in the Early Middle Ages. An Attempt at a Comprehensive Analysis with a Particular Focus on the Polish Lands*), Stanaszek aimed to examine unusual funerary practices among the Slavs in light of the European phenomenon of 'vampirism'. In general, his works display a much more sophisticated understanding of the topic than those of his predecessors, who often used sensationalist labels such as *upiór*, *strzyga* or *vampire* as throwaway interpretations. While discussing the different variants of atypical burials from Poland, Stanaszek on several occasions referred to the well-known dissertation on ghosts, vampires and demons by Dom Augustin Calmet[57] and showed an awareness of several other international works on the notion of the living dead in various cultural milieus, thereby introducing the wide and international field of vampire studies to the Polish academic and popular audience. It is somewhat surprising, however, that he did not reference any of the classic monographs by, for example, Dudley Wright,[58] Montague Summers[59] or Jan Louis Perkowski,[60] which are rightly regarded as important cornerstones in vampire research. Although from today's perspective we may say that the early works of Stanaszek had a number of shortcomings and simplifications, they undoubtedly instigated a considerable breakthrough in Polish early medieval archaeology and gave direction to future scholars.

Among Stanaszek's most important studies from the 1990s was a paper concerning unusual funerary practices in the eleventh-century cemetery at Sandomierz in Lesser Poland.[61] His article was the first comprehensive and multidisciplinary attempt to examine early medieval atypical burials from a Polish site. Stanaszek set their different variants in the wider context of various antique and late medieval accounts that describe dealings with revenants. To even further substantiate his interpretations, in a similar vein to his predecessors (e.g. Bonifacy Zielonka and Małgorzata Kowalczyk), he drew on examples from Slavic ethnography. The most important aspect of Stanaszek's work is that he personally conducted anthropological and paleopathological analyses of skeletal materials from the site and paid attention to more details than merely the sex and age of the deceased, as had been the norm in earlier publications. Among the most evident examples representing atypical funerary behaviour at Sandomierz, he listed two graves (no. 10 and 26) with missing heads/skulls and two further graves with sharp objects in close contact with the skeletal remains (a knife between the ribs in grave 10 and an arrowhead stuck in the spine in grave 26). In addition, there was also a grave of a 'dwarf' (no. 44) and three cases of men buried in a prone position (graves 9 and 90). With regard to grave 9, which contained as many as three individuals (two of whom lay in a prone position), Stanaszek argued that it may have belonged to people who had died in a plague, but he also considered it probable that the way in which the dead had been treated expressed a fear of revenants.[62]

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[54] Łuka 1973, pp. 67–69.

[55] See Śledzik-Kamińska, Terlecka 1988; Łuczak, Kordala 1995, p. 5, 11 for 'vampiric' interpretations of several atypical graves from early medieval Poland.

[56] Stanaszek 1998; 1999; 2000; 2001.

[57] See, for example, Calmet 1746; 1751; 1759; 1993.

[58] Wright 2001[1914].

[59] Summers 2001[1961]; 2005[1929].

[60] Perkowski 1976; 1989; 2006.

[61] Stanaszek 1998.

Although it may be inferred from Stanaszek's early publications that he favoured the 'vampire' interpretation of atypical burials above all other possibilities (e.g. he made practically no attempts to consider them as burials of criminals or suicides), his works from the late 1990s certainly demonstrate the scale and diversity of these practices in early medieval Poland. Consequently, by collecting and assessing a large body of material, he certainly provided a good starting point for further inquiries into the subject.

2000-2010: Revisiting the problem of atypical burials in Poland

In 1999, Jacek Wrzesiński and Wojciech Dzieduszycki organised an important conference devoted to atypical burials. It was called simply *Czarownice* (Eng. *Witches*) and served as the second installment of the archaeological and anthropological workshops *Funeralia Lednickie*, which started in 1994 at Lednica in Greater Poland.[63] The overarching aim of the conference in 1999 was to initiate a wider and more critical debate on unusual funerary phenomena among different societies that lived in the Polish lands from prehistory to modern times. In the introduction to the volume published as a result of this event, Wrzesiński rightly observed that past scholars had often used the term 'vampire' in an uncritical way and had rarely attempted to provide comprehensive interpretations of atypical burials.[64] In many instances, the sensationalist labels 'vampire' or 'anti-vampire burial' had served merely as throwaway comments and allowed scholars to avoid engaging in difficult debates of problematic finds. The papers collected in the conference volume were therefore intended to reinvigorate this field of study by providing a wider empirical and interpretational context for ongoing debates, and by offering critical methodological remarks (e.g. with regard to examining atypical burials *in situ* during excavations). Although most of the articles focused predominantly on the area of Poland, and on case studies from the medieval and early modern periods, the authors occasionally pointed out analogous discoveries in other parts of the world.[65] As in the case of the earlier publications of Stanaszek, however, none of them seem to have been aware of the important studies of vampirism by scholars like Wright, Summers and Perkowski, and very few quoted academic literature published in languages other than Polish. Nevertheless, the 1999 conference at Lednica was certainly a very significant event which instigated gradual changes in the perception of atypical burials in Poland. A number of themes discussed there were also taken up and revised during later installments of *Funeralia Lednickie*.[66]

In 2004, four years after Łukasz Maurycy Stanaszek defended his Master's thesis on anti-vampire burials, another work on the same topic was published by Przemysław Żydok.[67] Żydok defined them very broadly as 'burials deviating from typical funerary practices within a given area'.[68] In his view, these unusual acts of burial were intended to eliminate the possible threat that the dead could cause to the living.

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[62] Stanaszek 1998, p. 23; following earlier arguments of Zoll-Adamikowa 1971, p. 53.

[63] Wrzesiński 2000a. This volume was reprinted in 2008 with some additional articles - see Wrzesiński 2008a.

[64] Wrzesiński 2000b.

[65] Dzieduszycki 2000; Krzyszowski 2000; Łapo 2000; Sikorski 2000; Szymański 2000; Wrzesiński 2000c.

[66] With regard to the early medieval period see, for example, Felis 2007; 2010, pp. 309-311; Gardeła 2010b; 2011b; 2012b; Sikora P. 2010; Kajkowski 2012; Matczak 2014. With regard to the early modern times, see Krajewska 2011; Duma 2012; Kozłowska, Kępa, Wrębiak, Szostek, Głąb, Buśko, Głowa, Dryja 2012.

[67] Żydok 2004.

In this study, Żydok provided a comprehensive list of different types of early medieval graves that in his view displayed unusual characteristics and implied fear of revenants. Having reviewed a wide range of cemetery reports, he argued that the most common atypical variants in the period spanning the late tenth to thirteenth centuries included interring the dead in prone position, (pre- or *post-mortem*) beheading, and covering the bodies with stones. In addition, among other examples of so-called anti-vampire funerary practices Żydok listed:[69]

- Perforated/pierced skulls (with a sharp instrument, for example an iron nail)
- Knives, stakes or other sharp objects stuck in the body
- Stones, clay or coins in the mouth of the deceased
- Flexed burials
- Graves of individuals with cut off or broken limbs
- Graves in marginal areas of the cemetery or secluded graves
- Unfurnished graves
- Graves with an unusual orientation
- Graves of partially cremated dead
- Reopened graves

Due to the relatively narrow scope of his research – and lack of any comparative materials or awareness of the vast international literature on the subject of revenants or vampires – Żydok was convinced that unusual treatment of the corpse was a direct result of the fear of the return of the dead. While *some* of his categories of so-called anti-vampire burials did indeed display unusual characteristics and may possibly represent attempts to immobilise or annihilate the dangerous dead, from today's perspective it is completely unjustified to see each and every instance of atypical burial as indicating fear of revenants.[70] Various problems with Żydok's understanding of different categories of atypical burials will be discussed more thoroughly in the further chapters of this book, but before we do so it is vital to briefly highlight some of the major source-critical problems with his interpretations:

- Sharp objects that appear to be stuck in the skeletal remains do not necessarily have to indicate attempts to hold the dangerous dead in their graves – in many instances arrows or other weapons stuck in the bones could signal that the person died in combat.[71] Equally ambiguous are cases when knives are found on or in the chest of the deceased – such instances do not have to imply that the person was stabbed *post-mortem* as part of some apotropaic ritual. Instead, the presence of a knife on the chest could merely signal that the item was hung (perhaps in a scabbard) around the neck. A knife *inside* the chest (as if the person had been struck with it) usually results from post-depositional processes – when the soft tissues decompose, items placed on the chest subside.[72]
- Cut-off, broken or missing limbs do not have to indicate only apotropaic practices intended to immobilise a revenant, but can result from numerous other circumstances. The severing of limbs could have occurred as a result of some unfortunate accident or judicial punishment (e.g. for theft) to which the person was subjected. It is also possible that some people were born with missing limbs and therefore the absence of a hand or leg in the grave could indicate that the person was handicapped rather than a criminal or a revenant.[73]
- Burials in marginal areas may indeed suggest some form of social exclusion, but they may equally reflect the gradual development of the cemetery and the filling of its space. Every cemetery has graves in marginal locations; they do not have to convey any special meaning.
- The lack of grave goods, although regarded as a deviant feature by Żydok, is not at all unusual in early medieval Poland. Numerous early medieval graves are completely devoid of objects; classifying all of them as belonging to revenants is a serious methodological mistake.
- Unusual orientation can indeed imply some 'otherness' of the deceased, for example that they came from a different social, religious or ethnic background. However, aligning the dead in an unusual way (i.e. along the N-S axis at a site where most burials are

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[68] Żydok 2004, p. 43 – 'Mianem pochówku o charakterze antywampirycznym określać będę każdy obiekt sepulkralny, który rejestruje działania nie mieszczące się w zakresie typowego dla danej grupy ludzkiej (jednostki kulturowej / na danym obszarze) obrządku pogrzebowego. Działania te miały na celu zlikwidowanie domniemanego zagrożenia płynącego ze strony zmarłego wobec żywych członków tejże grupy' / 'In this study, the term anti-vampire burial will be used to refer to every grave with traces of mortuary practices that are unusual for a given group of people (cultural group within a given area). These practices were intended to eliminate any potential threat the deceased might inflict upon the living members of the community' (Translation by Leszek Gardeła).

[69] Żydok 2004, p. 44.

[70] See Gardeła in press d, for a more detailed discussion and critique of Żydok's views.

[71] The remains of a man who probably died from an arrow shot were found at Międzyrzecz. The arrowhead was between the man's ribs. For a detailed analysis of this find, see Gładykowska-Rzeczycka 2015.

[72] See also similar line of critique in Stanaszek 2016a, pp. 96–97.

[73] See comments in Stanaszek 2016a, p. 63.

aligned W-E) may in some instances be the only way to dig a grave in a particular spot. This can happen because of clustered concentrations of other graves in the cemetery, but also because of the presence of other obstructive features such as trees, roots, stones etc.

- Partial cremation of the bodies may suggest some form of apotropaic practices or the desire to 'send' the dead to the Otherworld more quickly and efficiently, but traces of burning on the skeletal remains can also result from death in a fire or from other practice (not necessarily with ritual connotations) conducted in the cemetery.
- Reopened graves in early medieval Poland have only recently received increased scholarly attention and it is clear that they represent very complex funerary phenomena.[74] The meaning behind some reopened burials may relate to the fear of revenants, and this is indeed attested in various medieval sources and ethnographic accounts from early modern times. Alternative interpretational variants are also plausible, however, and these may include, for example, adding other individuals to the same grave (e.g. members of the family), making space for subsequent burials at the same site, (re)using parts of the deceased persons' bodies/skeletons for magic or cult purposes (e.g. making amulets, acquiring relics), and other possibilities. The phenomenon of reopening graves in early medieval Poland will be critically discussed in detail in Chapter 7.

After the publication of Żydok's article, several other scholars took up the topic of atypical burials in their research but most of them seem to have uncritically agreed with his assumptions and did not attempt to interpret these practices in a more nuanced way. In addition to several Master's theses,[75] among the works published between 2004–2010 and inspired by Żydok's article are studies by scholars like Antoni Porzeziński,[76] Monika Włodarczak,[77] and Andrzej Marek Wyrwa.[78]

In his 2006 monograph of the early medieval cemetery at Cedynia (site 2a),[79] Antoni Porzeziński included a separate section entitled *Zabiegi antywampiryczne* (Eng. *Anti-vampire practices*), where he discussed prone burials, decapitations, graves with stones laid directly on the dead and other examples of unusual mortuary behaviour (**Fig. 3.10**).[80] In his opinion these practices were 'carefully thought-out and probably connected with the belief that the dead belonged to a group of *upiory*'.[81] Apart from providing a few analogies from other parts of Poland and Slovakia, Porzeziński made no attempt to discuss atypical graves from Cedynia more thoroughly. His manner of presenting them is very simplistic: every grave that deviates from the norm is regarded as belonging to a revenant.

Porzeziński follows exactly the same line of reasoning in his short 2008 article entitled *Wczesnośredniowieczne pochówki antywampiryczne na nekropolach w Cedyni (stan. 2 i 2a)* (Eng. *Early Medieval Anti-vampire Burials in the Cemeteries at Cedynia (site 2 and 2a)*).[82] The paper was intended as an overview of the various atypical burial types observed at two early medieval sites at Cedynia in Western Pomerania. It begins with a short history of research on so-called anti-vampire burials in Poland. The tone of the text makes it clear that Porzeziński's inspirations for this study were drawn from earlier works of Zoll-Adamikowa, Stanaszek and especially those of Żydok, whose ideas of anti-vampire burials he accepts in a perfunctory way. Among the different variants of anti-vampire graves from the two cemeteries at Cedynia he lists examples where:[83]

- The head is separated from the body and placed on the ground face down
- The head is separated from the body and placed outside the grave pit
- The head is separated from the body and a stone is put in its place
- The head is separated from the body and buried at the feet. A stone is put in place of the head
- The body is buried on the side with flexed legs and with the face directed towards the ground
- The body is buried on the side with the legs strongly flexed
- The body is buried prone with the face down
- The head is decapitated and the body is buried prone and flexed
- The body is hacked to pieces and the remains are disarticulated in the grave
- The body is covered with stones
- The upper limbs are tied
- One or both upper limbs are placed underneath the pelvis
- The lower limbs are crossed and tied
- There is a lack of any grave goods

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[74] Gardeła, Kajkowski, Szczepanik 2015; Gardeła in press a.

[75] See, for example, Grodzka 2001.

[76] Porzeziński 2006; 2008.

[77] Włodarczak 2008.

[78] Wyrwa 2008.

[79] On the importance of Cedynia throughout the ages see, for example, Filipowiak, Siuchniński 1957; Filipowiak 1972.

[80] Porzeziński 2006.

[81] Porzeziński 2006, pp. 151–152: 'Przeprowadzone zabiegi były starannie przemyślane i związane najprawdopodobniej z posądzeniem zmarłego o możliwość pośmiertnej przynależności do kręgu upiorów'.

[82] Porzeziński 2008.

[83] Porzeziński 2008, p. 14.

Fig. 3.10. Panorama of Cedynia. The early medieval stronghold and cemetery are visible in the far background. After Filipowiak 1959, p. 254.

Without any attempts to substantiate his arguments, Porzeziński interprets these examples as follows:[84]

- Decapitation or cutting the body to pieces = annihilation of the vampire
- Prone burial and flexing of the legs = an attempt to prevent the revenant from moving inside the grave and getting out
- Covering the body with stones = immobilizing the dead and preventing it from leaving the grave
- Flexing of the lower limbs = immobilizing the dead
- Partial cremation = destroying the vampire with 'purifying fire'
- Severing of the lower limbs = preventing the vampire from leaving the grave

Again, as in the many cases reviewed above, no attempts were made to offer alternative interpretations. Porzeziński uncritically accepts the authoritative statements regarding atypical burials provided by previous scholars, and even though the site at Cedynia contains such a wide variety of atypical graves, he considers *all of them* to reflect a fear of vampires. When he occasionally attempts to provide some explanations for his claims, the ideas he proposes are purely conjectural, not to say naïve – for example, he suggests that traces of wooden posts or stones around the bodies 'played a magic purpose and created a border through which the soul of the deceased could not pass.'[85] This view finds absolutely no support in extant sources. At the end of his paper, Porzeziński concludes his analysis of the atypical graves from Cedynia with the following statement:

> 'It is generally assumed that the phenomenon of vampirism within the socio-cultural system of the Slavs who inhabited the area of Poland came into existence in the tenth-eleventh century as a result of adapting to new cultural norms (Christianity) which caused changes in funerary practices and substituted cremation for inhumation.'[86]

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[84] Porzeziński 2008, p. 14.

[85] Porzeziński 2008, p. 19: 'Obstawy drewniane (ślady kołków) i kamienne miały charakter magiczny, stanowiący wydzieloną granicę, poza którą nie mogła się wydostać dusza zmarłego'.

[86] Porzeziński 2008, p. 19: 'Generalnie przyjmuje się, że zjawisko wampiryzmu w obrębie systemu społeczno-kulturowego ludności słowiańskiej zamieszkującej tereny Polski wykształciło się na przełomie X i XI wieku w wyniku szeroko następującego procesu adaptacyjnego nowych impulsów kulturowych (chrześcijańskich) powodujących zmianę obrządku pogrzebowego z kremacji na inhumację'.

As we shall see further below, the problem of vampirism and the phenomenon of atypical burials in early medieval Poland is much more complicated than Porzeziński assumes.

Another archaeologist who discussed atypical funerary practices was Monika Włodarczak in 2008[87]. Her paper was published in a volume based on the proceedings of a student conference organised by the Institute of Prehistory in Poznań and uncritically repeats much of what had been previously said in the works of scholars like Wrzesiński[88] and Porzeziński.[89]

The third article from 2008 is Andrzej Marek Wyrwa's *Zabobony, „wampiry" i remedia antywampiryczne. Przyczynek do poznania zachowań funeralnych* (Eng. *Superstitions, "Vampires" and Anti-vampire Remedies. A Contribution to the Study of Funerary Practices*), released in the second, expanded edition of the *Czarownice* volume. His paper offers a fairly decent overview of popular superstitions regarding the living dead recorded in various textual sources from the Middle Ages and early modern times, which Wyrwa compares with archaeological evidence from a number of medieval cemeteries in Poland. Despite some minor errors – e.g. categorizing vampires, *upiory* and *strzygi* as demons,[90] or assuming that the idea of vampirism among the Slavs dates back to the fourth century AD[91] – Wyrwa's paper is a valuable contribution to studies of atypical burial practices. While most earlier works published in Poland focused only on prehistoric and early medieval atypical burials, Wyrwa's article looks at parallel examples from late medieval and early modern cemeteries. Particular attention is devoted to the archaeological discoveries from the area of Łekno where some of the deceased were buried with stones or bricks on their necks or in a prone position. Inspired by ethnographic descriptions of dealings with alleged revenants, Wyrwa sees all cases of atypical burials from the Łekno area as anti-vampire practices and does not consider any alternative interpretations. He might perhaps be right in some instances, but it seems that a number of these graves could be interpreted as belonging to criminals. Alternatively, the atypical form of burial could simply result from hasty funerary procedures. The motif of placing stones on the necks of the dead, which has been noted in some graves in the Łekno area, could also be interpreted in multiple ways, and may not necessarily have a negative meaning or be connected with fear of the dead. I will discuss this phenomenon more thoroughly in Chapter 6.

2. NEW PERSPECTIVES ON ATYPICAL BURIALS IN POLAND

Over the last decade, a new generation of Polish scholars has begun to approach the problem of atypical burials in a much more critical and open-minded way than their predecessors. This has been possible through the application of a broad spectrum of interdisciplinary methods and theories, combining textual sources, archaeology, ethnography, and natural sciences. Below, we shall review some of the major new contributions to this field of study.

Atypical burials in a judicial perspective

As we have seen above, the idea that some atypical burials could reflect various forms of punishment for convicts was sporadically suggested in past archaeological studies – for example, in the publications of Jerzy Gąssowski,[92] Eleonora and Zdzisław Kaszewscy,[93] Eugeniusz Cnotliwy[94] and Bonifacy Zielonka.[95] However, apart from laconic suggestions that a particular grave 'could be that of a criminal', no detailed discussions were undertaken and no attempts were made to examine particular graves in the context of textual sources or comparative evidence from Poland and other parts of Europe. Over the last fifteen years or so, this situation has slowly begun to change due to the development of so-called 'legal archaeology'. This sub-field of archaeological research in Poland has a relatively long history[96] but major breakthroughs took place in the 1980s when Witold Maisel published two important monographs entitled *Archeologia prawna Polski*[97] and *Archeologia prawna Europy*[98] (Eng. *Legal Archaeology in Poland* and *Legal Archaeology in Europe*), which focused on various aspects of law and justice in past societies. In both of these works, Maisel expressed a particular interest in places where executions of criminals had been conducted and in the diverse repertoire of objects used in these procedures, thereby bringing many overlooked or previously underappreciated archaeological finds to a wider scholarly audience. Although Maisel's pioneering work was well received in academia and frequently quoted on various occasions, it took another twenty years for Polish archaeologists to seriously engage with the topic of law and justice in the past.

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[87] Włodarczak 2008.

[88] Wrzesiński 2000c.

[89] Porzeziński 2006.

[90] Wyrwa 2008, p. 47.

[91] Wyrwa 2008, p. 48.

[92] Gąssowski 1950.

[93] Kaszewscy 1971.

[94] Cnotliwy 1963.

[95] Zielonka 1962.

[96] For a history of legal archaeology in Poland, see Maisel 1982, pp. 27–29.

[97] Maisel 1982.

[98] Maisel 1989.

In 2007, the renewed interest in execution sites and atypical burial practices led to the establishment of a special research society called *Stowarzyszenie Badań i Ochrony Zabytków Prawa* (Eng. *The Society for Research and Protection of Legal Monuments*). Among its members are archaeologists, historians and anthropologists who are actively engaged in interdisciplinary research on aspects of medieval and early modern law. Together, they participate in excavations at medieval and early modern execution sites, organise academic seminars, and undertake research trips in Poland and beyond. The Society also publishes a journal called *Pomniki Dawnego Prawa* (Eng. *Monuments of Past Law*), which is devoted to various aspects of medieval and early modern judicial practices as well as to different methods and instruments of punishment. The articles included in *Pomniki Dawnego Prawa* usually pertain to the area of Poland or the Czech Republic, but on occasion they also concern other parts of Europe. Among the published materials are excavation reports from medieval and early modern execution sites as well as in-depth studies of notions relating to law and justice in the past. An especially valuable aspect of this journal is that it brings a broad and varied range of textual and archival sources to a wider scholarly audience. In particular, a number of papers published in *Pomniki Dawnego Prawa* have touched on folkloristic beliefs and magic acts that took place at execution sites and cemeteries. Most articles are written in Polish or Czech, but they are usefully supplemented by summaries in German.

Apart from the many important and groundbreaking papers published in *Pomniki Dawnego Prawa*, among the major recent contributions to the field of history and archaeology of law in Poland are the works of Daniel Wojtucki, especially his 2009 monograph entitled *Publiczne miejsca straceń na Dolnym* Śląsku *od XV do połowy XIX wieku* (Eng. *Public Execution Sites in Lower Silesia from the Fifteenth to Mid Nineteenth Century*).[99] Although Wojtucki's book focuses on the Late Middle Ages and early modern times in Poland, the material that he has collected has important implications for analyses of unusual mortuary practices from other time periods and cultural milieus. As the title suggests, the main topic of Wojtucki's work are places where justice was exercised and special devices such as the gallows and the so-called *Rabenstein*[100] were built. The emergence of public execution sites in Poland was associated with the development of medieval towns and the gradual sophistication of legal culture. Criminals were punished at places which were clearly visible in the landscape, for example on hilltops or in close vicinity to the main roads. Upon entering a medieval town, the sight of such execution places would have served as a grim reminder and as a preventive measure against committing unlawful deeds. In his book, Wojtucki meticulously examines the meanings and development of different devices for torture and execution through the ages, discussing the ways in which they were constructed, repaired and finally dismantled. Much attention in his monograph is focused on the different ways of dealing with criminals, such as hanging, decapitation, breaking on the wheel, burning, drowning, live burial, hacking up the body and impaling. Based on a vast corpus of archival materials and folkloristic accounts, but also on the results of recent excavations of execution sites, Wojtucki convincingly demonstrates that unusual burial practices need not only result from fear of revenants, but also (and sometimes predominantly) from acts intended to humiliate and even further condemn criminals during public executions.[101] He also sees many of the late medieval execution sites as 'theatres of justice' – places where common people would gather to take part in a very peculiar form of entertainment, a violent and visually dramatic spectacle of torture and death. The grim nature of medieval executions served a didactic purpose and were intended to warn and remind the inhabitants of the town what might become of them if they behaved unlawfully. Wojtucki rightly acknowledges that some medieval execution sites were regarded in the popular imagination as places endowed with special powers, and were occasionally visited by magic workers in search of body parts and other items associated with convicts (e.g. ropes or chains on which the criminals were hanged); these were believed to have supernatural qualities and could be transformed into amulets and/or used as medicines.[102]

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[99] Wojtucki 2009; but see also the earlier studies of Grenda, Paternoga, Wojtucki 2004; Grenda, Paternoga, Rutka, Wojtucki 2007a; 2007b; 2008; Wojtucki 2007; 2008.

[100] The *Rabenstein* is a special construction usually made of stone, in the form of a round or square-shaped elevated platform.

[101] Wojtucki 2009, pp. 211–213.

In 2010, the archaeologist Paweł Duma published an important work entitled *Grób alienata. Pochówki dzieci nieochrzczonych, samobójców i skazańców w późnym średniowieczu i dobie wczesnonowożytnej* (Eng. *Grave of the Alienated. Burials of Unbaptised Children, Suicides and Convicts in the Late Middle Ages and Early Modern Times*).[103] This book, which is based on Duma's MA Thesis defended at the University of Wrocław, deals specifically with different categories of atypical burials from the Late Middle Ages and early modern times, mainly in Poland but also in other parts of Europe, particularly Germany and Bohemia (the Czech Republic). Much space in Duma's monograph is devoted to traces of atypical mortuary practices at execution sites, but contrary to Wojtucki – who is a historian and archivist – Duma looks at the material through the eyes of an archaeologist and pays much more attention to the analysis of graves and physical devices used to execute convicts, such as gallows. By skillfully interweaving textual, archival and archaeological material he has been able to throw new light on many previously disregarded, understudied or misinterpreted aspects of Polish funerary archaeology. It is evident from his study that Duma is very critical of earlier ideas concerning the so-called anti-vampire burials and he rightly argues that these practices may have resulted from various circumstances, not necessarily fear of the dead. An important innovation in Duma's work is the wider acknowledgment and analysis of unusual burials of children, for example in ceramic vessels, a topic which has previously received little interest in this part of Europe.[104] The notion of atypical child burials in early and late medieval Poland has been further developed in a recent article by Gardeła and Duma[105] and I will return to it yet again in Chapter 6.

As a follow up to his previous studies into atypical burials in the Late Middle Ages, in 2015 Duma released another book entitled *Śmierć nieczysta na Śląsku. Studia nad obrządkiem pogrzebowym społeczeństwa przedindustrialnego* (Eng. *Profane Death in Silesia. A Study on Funeral Practices of the Pre-Industrial Society*).[106] The monograph is based on Duma's doctoral dissertation and has a very strict focus on the region of Silesia. It explores the notion of 'bad death' based on thorough and interdisciplinary analyses of atypical mortuary practices which were conducted during burials of unbaptised children, victims of epidemics, suicides, convicts, and other social deviants. Considerable attention is also devoted to discussions of Silesian execution sites (e.g. stone gallows), many of which were discovered very recently and excavated by Duma himself. As in his previous works, Duma maintains his critical attitude towards the common trend of labelling atypical burials as belonging to vampires, and elegantly demonstrates the serious source-critical problems of such simplistic interpretations. Based on a range of archival sources and ethnographic accounts, he shows that the term 'vampire' was unknown in Silesia until the nineteenth century and that in medieval and early modern times the people of this region shared a belief in a wide range of other revenants, each of which had their own special name and characteristics (e.g. *Neuntöter*, *Nachzehrer* and *Wiedergänger*). These peculiar beliefs and attitudes to alleged revenants prevailed among the Silesian folk for several hundred years until they finally declined in the nineteenth century, when the death penalty was restricted and public execution sites with gallows were abandoned.

The various works of Duma and Wojtucki have become important cornerstones of legal archaeology in Poland and continue to inspire many other scholars, including the present author. Although the main chronological focus of Wojtucki and Duma is on the Late Middle Ages, their observations are also of relevance for earlier historical periods. The adequacy of Duma's and Wojtucki's interpretations was demonstrated by Gardeła and Kajkowski,[107] who, in 2013, explored the possibility of interpreting early medieval atypical burials in the context of judicial practices, as resulting from legal punishments.[108] I will return to the publications of Wojtucki and Duma on numerous occasions in the further chapters of this book.

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[102] On this theme, see also Wojtucki 2015 with further references.

[103] Duma 2010.

[104] But see Lencewicz 1912; Jakimowicz 1929; Kotula 1960; Zawadzka-Antosik 1973; Kowalczyk 2004; Miechowicz 2007.

[105] Gardeła, Duma 2013.

[106] Duma 2015.

[107] Gardeła, Kajkowski 2013a.

[108] Maisel 1982; Gołdyn 2006.

Conferences and edited volumes on atypical burials

When discussing the latest developments in Polish approaches to non-normative funerary practices, it is vital to note that, over the last several years, atypical burials have been debated during a number of conferences, the proceedings of which have been published in several edited volumes.

In 2010, atypical burials were the main theme of a special volume of the journal *Acta Archaeologica Lodziensia*, entitled *Wymiary inności. Nietypowe zjawiska w obrzędowości pogrzebowej od pradziejów po czasy nowożytne* (Eng. *Facets of Otherness. Unusual Funerary Practices from Prehistory to Modern Times*).[109] As the title suggests, the volume includes papers on unusual funerary practices in different time periods and among various societies from prehistory to early modern times. Most contributions, however, focus on the medieval period. The majority of the articles differ considerably from previous studies in that their authors are remarkably careful in their interpretations and refrain from seeing all instances of atypical burials as representing a fear of the dead. Of particular interest and value is a study by Arkadiusz Koperkiewicz which explores possible interpretations of the custom of flexed and prone burials, and of placing the hands of the deceased on their shoulders.[110] Contrary to his predecessors, Koperkiewicz sees these acts not as apotropaic practices intended to hold the dead in their graves but as signals of various other emotions (not necessarily negative ones), and even as *post-mortem* manifestations of piety and religious devotion. We will return to these notions in Chapter 4.

Unusual funerary practices were also the main theme of two installments of *International Interdisciplinary Meetings 'Motifs through the Ages'*, held at the West-Cassubian Museum in Bytów in 2012 and 2014.[111] The first of these two conferences was devoted to exploring the motif of the head in past societies, in particular among the Celts, Slavs, Scandinavians and Prussians. The second conference examined the widespread practice of grave reopening and robbery. The published volumes from these events contain detailed case studies which place the head motif and the phenomenon of grave disturbance in a very broad cross-cultural and cross-disciplinary perspective, especially since the contributors represent multiple academic disciplines, including archaeology, cultural anthropology, history of religion, philology and sociology.

Pathological analyses of atypical burials

In addition to the different developments reviewed above, it is also worth noting that some early medieval atypical burials from Poland have recently been subjected to comprehensive pathological analyses. Several scholars, including Łukasz Maurycy Stanaszek and Magdalena Matczak, have observed that in medieval societies people who suffered from various mental or physical impairments may have been perceived as potentially dangerous in both life and in death. With regard to the area of medieval Poland specifically, among such 'suspicious' physical characteristics Stanaszek includes various mental impairments, kyphosis (hunchback), gigantism, dwarfism, having two rows of teeth, hairy palms or joined eyebrows.[112] As comparative analyses show, individuals with such impairments could have been considered 'dangerous', and upon death may have been buried in a way that deviated from the norm.[113]

In a recently published study, Matczak has discussed the results of paleopathological analyses of atypical burials from two early medieval cemeteries at Kałdus in Kuyavian-Pomeranian Voivodeship. She sought to determine whether the individuals buried there in an atypical way differed from the rest of the population. The standard funerary practice at Kałdus involved inhumation in a supine position along the W-E axis. From among 790 graves, Matczak isolated 15 graves dating from between the final quarter of the tenth century to the first half of the thirteenth century which, following earlier classifications, had been labelled as 'anti-vampire graves'.[114] Matczak concludes that, although these so-called anti-vampire graves from Kałdus did indeed contain individuals with various pathologies (e.g. broken bones or decapitations, cancer and tumors), these impairments were not as severe as those of other individuals (e.g. with leprosy, trepanation, amputated body parts) who had been interred in a normative way.[115] Moreover, her study also shows that in the cemeteries at Kałdus there were no specially designated areas for the burial of people who suffered from various pathologies, although there was one atypical grave (grave 256/01) located in a marginal area of the site.[116] Matczak arrives at the conclusion that the non-normative treatment of the dead at Kałdus did not result from different pathologies these individuals had suffered from in life. Of course, we cannot exclude the possibility that they had some other special characteristics or suffered from mental impairments, but at present these cannot be inferred from the available osteological materials.[117]

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[109] Skóra, Kurasiński 2010.

[110] Koperkiewicz 2010.

[111] Gardeła, Kajkowski 2013b.; Gardeła, Kajkowski 2015a; 2015b.

[112] Stanaszek 1999; 2007.

[113] See the various contributions in Murphy 2008.

[114] Matczak 2014, pp. 439–440.

[115] Matczak 2014, p. 441.

A range of new paleopathological analyses of several atypical graves from early medieval Poland have also been published in a new monograph entitled *Wampiry w średniowiecznej Polsce* (Eng. *Vampires in Medieval Poland*) by Łukasz Maurycy Stanaszek.[118] This book is based on Stanaszek's aforementioned MA Thesis from 2000 and serves as the first synthesis of the motif of 'vampirism' in medieval Poland intended for a popular audience.[119] The study explains how the fear of revenants developed in medieval Europe and what factors led to considering some individuals to be dangerous dead. As an anthropologist, Stanaszek points out that, in the Middle Ages, peculiar appearance, physical impairments and 'bad death' may have all contributed to the belief in the dead rising from their graves to sow terror among the living. In his discussions, Stanaszek devotes a lot of attention to a number of illnesses which may have given rise to the belief in revenants, especially porphyria. He also notes that in the past it was often difficult to determine with certainty whether or not a person was actually dead, and that there may have been instances of accidentally burying people who had fallen into a cataleptic trance. Based on ethnographic accounts, Stanaszek also presents a wide range of practices which Polish people employed to protect themselves against undesired activity of the dead, including exhuming the dead, decapitating them, turning their bodies face down, or burning their remains to ashes. Ultimately, by combining archaeological evidence, osteological analyses and ethnographic accounts, Stanaszek attempts to interpret selected examples of atypical burials from early medieval Poland as those of 'vampires'. As a result of his studies, he has been able to isolate eighteen examples of graves which, in his view, display attempts to immobilize or annihilate the dead.[120] These graves are discussed in detail in an appendix to his book and some of them, apart from displaying a non-normative treatment of the corpse, do indeed provide osteological evidence that the deceased differed from the rest of the population.[121]

Stanaszek's study is the first published synthesis of atypical burials from early medieval Poland and is certainly an important monograph containing many significant observations and conclusions. However, it must be emphasised that the corpus of funerary materials that have been considered in his monograph is incomplete and reflects the state of research in the year 2000 (which is when his MA Thesis was defended). Over the last seventeen years many new atypical burials have been found and, while some of these discoveries support Stanaszek's hypotheses, others require his assumptions to be revised. An updated analysis of all of the old and new discoveries of atypical graves from Poland will be undertaken in the further chapters of the present study.

Visualising atypical burials

Concluding this section, it should be mentioned that one of the latest trends in mortuary archaeology in Poland and elsewhere in Europe is the attempt to present different kinds of past burials with the use of visual art.[122] For the purposes of my previous studies, in collaboration with the Polish artist Mirosław Kuźma, I commissioned a range of full-colour reconstructions of early medieval graves displaying unusual characteristics. Among our first reconstructions of atypical graves from Poland was grave no. 146, which was discovered in an early medieval cemetery at Cedynia in Western Pomerania,[123] and grave 107 from the cemetery at Złota Pińczowska.[124] The following chapters of this work will also include Kuźma's artwork, which has been specifically commissioned for this publication. I will not discuss methodological aspects of the collaborative process that leads to the creation of such reconstructions, as the topic has been covered in several other publications.[125]

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[116] Matczak 2014, pp. 442–444. This grave included two decapitated individuals, a male and a female – this and other decapitation graves from Kałdus and other Polish sites will be discussed in further detail in Chapter 5.

[117] Matczak 2014, p. 450.

[118] Stanaszek 2016a; 2016b.

[119] For a recent hyper-critical review of this book, see Jurek 2016.

[120] Among the 'vampire' graves isolated by Stanaszek are: grave 2 from Adolfin, grave 43 from Brześć Kujawski, grave 8 from Buczek, grave 76 from Cedynia, grave 502 from Gruczno, grave 2 from Gwiazdowo, grave 24/57 from Kałdus, grave 11 from Legnica-Zamek, graves 96 and 104 from Niemcza, grave 47 from Radom, grave 90 from Sandomierz, grave 446 from Stary Brześć Kujawski, grave 110 from Stary Zamek, graves 15(29), 31(96), 189(349) from Wolin-Młynówka and grave 3 from Złota Pińczowska.

[121] Stanaszek 2016b.

[122] Gardeła, Kuźma 2012; Gardeła, Kajkowski 2015a.

[123] Malinowska-Łazarczyk 1982, p. 38; Porzeziński 2008, p. 28.

[124] Miśkiewicz 1967, pp. 120-121; 2010, pp. 144–146.

3. TERMINOLOGICAL CONCERNS AND PROBLEMS WITH THE LABEL 'VAMPIRE'

As we have seen above, until recently early and late medieval atypical burials discovered in Poland were usually thought to belong to 'vampires'. Today, attempts are made to substitute the problematic label '(anti-) vampire burial' with more neutral terms like 'atypical burial', 'deviant burial' or 'non-normative burial'.[126] Some scholars, however, prefer to hold on to the old terminology, but in doing so emphasise that they are using the label 'vampire' as an umbrella word for all sorts of revenants.[127] When accompanied by an appropriate commentary, this solution is indeed acceptable, but I fear that in the long run it can lead to misunderstandings, especially among the general public and the media. Beyond any doubt, labelling medieval revenants as 'vampires' is attention-grabbing, and a paper or book with such a word in its title will surely sell well and raise considerable interest from the media. Nevertheless, it must be stressed that in the light of extant textual sources the word 'vampire' is a completely inappropriate term for revenants in the early medieval period, not only in Poland but also in other parts of the world. In order to demonstrate this problem more explicitly, we need to take a look at the etymology of the word *vampire*.[128]

According to Kolczyński[129] the etymology of the Polish word *upiór* (or *upir*, *upier*, *upierzyca*) as well as *wampir* (*wąpir*, *wąpierz*, *wypiór*, *łupirz*), is highly problematic. Similar variants occur in Belarussian (*upar*, *vupar*), Ukranian (*upir*, *upyr*, *opyr*, *vopyr*) and Russian (*upir*, *upyr*). Some scholars, like Brückner, have suggested that the etymology of the word *upiór* is Slavic (originating somewhere in the Balkans), and that its initial variant was *wąpir*, which in later times transformed to *upir* among the Serbs, Russians and Czechs.[130] In Brückner's view the element *-pir* or *-pyr* could be connected with the act of 'flying'. An alternative interpretation sees the word **opir* as being associated with the word *piriti*, which among Serbo-Croatians is supposed to refer to blowing or bloating.[131] The word *wampir* and its variants does, however, appear in place names such as Wąpierz, Wyąpyrz and Wampior, which allegedly date to late medieval times.[132] Interestingly, in some academic works, the word *wampir* is believed to come from Turkish *uber*, which means sorcerer. The word *wampir* was adopted in a range of Western and Northern European languages in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and has remained in use until present times in forms such as *vampir*, *vampyr*, *vampire*, *vampiro* etc. All these etymological analyses imply that until the seventeenth or eighteenth century the word *upiór* or *vampire* was unknown in Poland, and that revenants in Western Slavic textual sources and folklore were only referred to as *strzyga* or *wieszczyca*.[133]

In this context, it is interesting to observe that ethnographic sources also mention a range of supernatural beings of a hostile character who are 'born' from people who died a bad death. Among them, we may list beings such as *latawiec*, *utopiec*, *topielec*, *wodnik*.[134]

In conclusion, labelling Polish burials, especially from the early medieval period, as belonging specifically to 'vampires' seems to be not only a terminological, but also a factual mistake. At the current state of research we simply do not know how (if at all) revenants were referred to in the language and imagination of the early medieval Slavs. What we can argue for, however, is that *some* (but not all) atypical burials did indeed express the popular fear that the dead would rise from their graves to cause some form of physical or mental harm to the living. Perhaps the diversity in the forms of atypical graves is a reflection of the diversity of beliefs and precautions against different kinds of living dead into which the deceased were feared of transforming?

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[125] Gardeła, Kuźma 2012; Gardeła in press b; in press e.

[126] See, for example, the recent articles by Wajda 2012; Kubicka 2014. Also worthy of note is an interesting paper by Kajkowski 2012, who interprets atypical burials in Pomerania as evidence of human sacrifice.

[127] See, for example, Stanaszek 2016a; 2016b.

[128] On the meaning of the word 'vampire' see , for example, Wilson 1985; Dundes 1998; Stachowski 2005.

[129] Kolczyński 2003, p. 222.

[130] Brückner 1985, pp. 280–284; Kolczyński 2003, p. 222.

[131] Moszyński 1967, pp. 616–617.

[132] Kolczyński 2003, p. 223.

[133] Simonides 1984, p. 71; Kolczyński 2003, p. 223.

[134] Kolczyński 2003, pp. 226–227.

4. TOWARDS A SYNTHESIS OF ATYPICAL BURIALS IN EARLY MEDIEVAL POLAND

Over the last six years, my own interest in early medieval funerary archaeology has led me to conduct detailed analyses of selected categories of deviant burials from early medieval Poland. On several occasions, I have discussed prone burials[135] and burials with large stones lying directly on the cadavers,[136] as well as instances of disturbed and reopened graves.[137] In all of these studies I have argued for the multivalence of atypical burial practices and refrained from interpreting them only as methods of preventing the dead from rising. In my analyses, I have made extensive use of comparative materials, especially from Viking Age Scandinavia[138] and Anglo-Saxon England.[139] The present monograph will synthesise the results of these earlier investigations and offer a comprehensive analysis and interpretation of unusual mortuary phenomena in Poland. Each of the following chapters will provide a thorough analysis of the most explicit variants of atypical funerary behaviour from cemeteries that date roughly between the tenth and thirteenth centuries. We shall begin with a chapter on prone burials and then continue with discussions on graves of beheaded individuals, graves with large stones lying directly on the dead, before finally presenting a number of new observations on reopened graves.

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[135] Gardeła 2011a; 2012a; 2015b.

[136] Gardeła 2011b; 2012c.

[137] Gardeła in press a; Gardeła, Kajkowski, Szczepanik 2015.

[138] Gardeła 2012b; 2013a; 2013b; 2013c.

[139] Reynolds 2009.

CHAPTER 4
FACE DOWN: PRONE BURIALS IN EARLY MEDIEVAL POLAND

1. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Prone burial is a funerary phenomenon that occurs in various parts of the world and among numerous societies.[1] Although prehistoric and medieval examples of interring people face down are often interpreted as reflecting a fear of revenants, a cross-cultural exploration of this practice leads to the conclusion that it was associated with a very wide range of meanings, not all of them negative.

The first discoveries of prone burials in early medieval cemeteries in Poland were made in the early twentieth century.[2] Initially, scholars refrained from providing any interpretations of these phenomena and merely noted that they differed from normative funerary behaviour – i.e. the common practice of burying the dead in supine position with the body aligned along the E-W axis. Some tentative explanations of prone burials began to appear in the 1950s–1970s, when the number and variety of atypical graves started to increase dramatically as a result of extensive excavation campaigns in Poland.[3] As we have seen in the previous chapter, past scholars were often very uncritical or even naïve in their discussions of atypical funerary behaviour and rarely attempted to situate the burial evidence from Poland into a wider context. Because of the deeply rooted tradition in Slavic early medieval archaeology of making connections with ethnography and folklore, it seemed justified for some archaeologists to project nineteenth- and early twentieth-century conceptions about the living dead (and ways of preventing their *post-mortem* activity) directly onto the early medieval material. This was often done uncritically, and without any regard for the considerable chronological, geographical and cultural distance between the early medieval finds and ethnographic descriptions of non-normative funerary practices. Because prone burials in ethnographic accounts are often associated with revenants, past scholars tended to assume that their early medieval examples must have also belonged to people who past societies feared would rise from their graves. Today, we know that this was not necessarily so. A more careful and nuanced approach to the problem of prone burials reveals that the fear of revenants is only one of many possible interpretations of these funerary practices.

This chapter provides a critical analysis of prone burials from the area of early medieval Poland, dating between the late tenth- and thirteenth centuries (**Fig. 4.1.**). The accompanying table includes a list of all graves of this type that I have been able to identify through extensive surveys of academic literature and archival documentation (**Table 1**). Each entry is supplemented by some basic anthropological/osteological information about the deceased and includes additional remarks about objects that occasionally accompanied them in their graves. The table also provides a comprehensive bibliography.

2. PRONE BURIALS IN EARLY MEDIEVAL POLAND: SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES

At the present moment, the corpus of prone burials from early medieval Poland includes thirty examples from seventeen sites. The graves share some similarities, but there are also a number of differences between them. Most prone burials are male, but at least four prone

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[1] See, for example, Kyll 1964; Arcini 2009; Brather 2009; Reynolds 2009, pp. 89–91, 160–161; Barber 2010, pp. 44–46, 49–50; Duma 2010, pp. 80, 104–105, 108, 110; Gardeła 2011a; 2012a; 2012b; 2013b; 2013c; 2015a; 2015b; Skóra 2014; Toplak 2015.

[2] Rajewski 1937, pp. 33, 54, 68–69.

[3] Zielonka 1957; 1958.

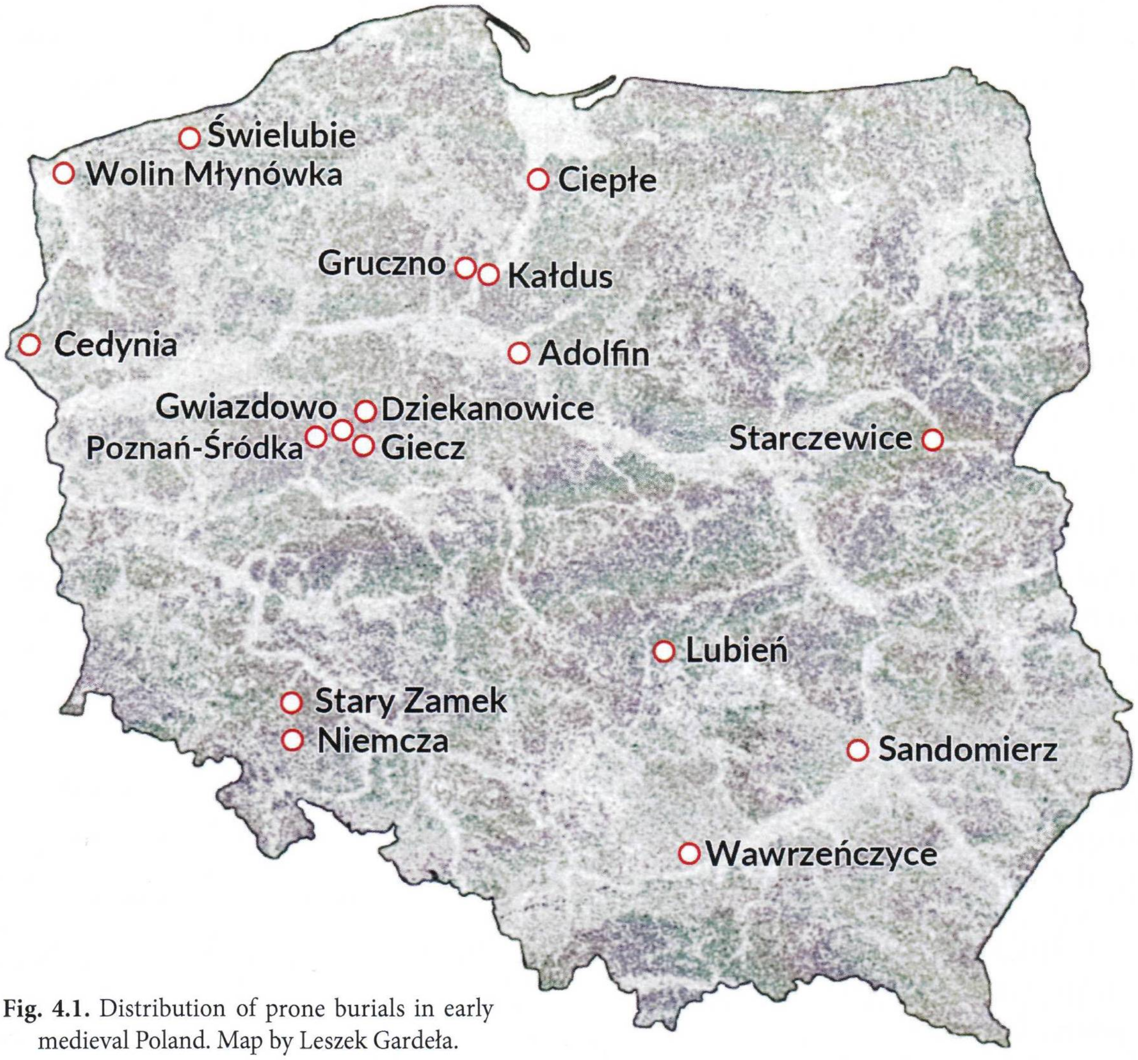

Fig. 4.1. Distribution of prone burials in early medieval Poland. Map by Leszek Gardeła.

burials of females have been found. The majority of these people died at the age of c. 25–35, but several graves of more mature individuals (40–50 years old) have also been discovered. So far only in the cemetery at Wawrzeńczyce a prone burial of a child, roughly 10–12 years-old, has been found.

National patterning of prone burials

Based on the evidence gathered so far, it appears that, in the period spanning the tenth and thirteenth centuries, the practice of prone burial was most common in Western Pomerania (8 examples), followed by Kuyavia and Chełmno land (7 examples), and Greater Poland (6 examples). It seems that prone burials were only conducted sporadically in other parts of Poland (Chart 1).

The distribution of prone burials in the western and north-western parts of Poland can be explained in a number of ways – either as a reflection of local funerary customs and superstitions (the fear of revenants, for example) or, what seems more probable, as a signal of the development of legal culture in those areas. Greater Poland was the heart of the newly established state and an area which, by the standards of that time, was densely populated and much richer than other parts of the Piast domain.[4] The formation and rapid development of the Piast state required the implementation of various systems of control and justice and the establishment of ways to deal with different kinds of evildoers and criminals. In light of this, it seems justified to assume that the substantial numbers of prone burials in Greater Poland and the Kuyavian-Pomeranian area, are not a reflection of increased fear of revenants in those areas, but rather the implementation of law and violent

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[4] For analyses and overviews of the various social and political processes that took place in Greater Poland in the Early Middle Ages see, for example, Kara 2002; 2004; Kurnatowska 2000; 2002; 2004; 2008; Pawlak, Pawlak 2015 with references.

Chart 1. Regional distribution of prone burials in early medieval Poland.

Voivodeship	Site	Grave number(s)	Total number of prone burials
Greater Poland Voivodeship	Dziekanowice	?	6
	Giecz	?	
	Gwiazdowo	2	
	Poznań-Śródka	23, 285, 292	
Kuyavian-Pomeranian Voivodeship	Adolfin	unnumbered	7
	Gruczno	502	
	Kałdus	24/57, 26/00, 131/01, 358/02, 383/03	
Lesser Poland Voivodeship	Wawrzeńczyce	157	1
Lower Silesian Voivodeship	Niemcza	96	2
	Stary Zamek	110	
Łódź Voivodeship	Lubień	49, 92, 110	3
Masovian Voivodeship	Starczewice	?	1
Pomeranian Voivodeship	Ciepłe	12	1
Świętokrzyskie Voivodeship	Sandomierz	9, 90	2
West Pomeranian Voivodeship	Cedynia	76, 183, 1039	7
	Świelubie	5	
	Wolin Młynówka	15(29), 31(96), 189(349)	

methods of punishment. This idea also corresponds well with the chronology of prone burials, the earliest of which (dating from the tenth to eleventh century) are found in the Piasts' homeland of Greater Poland and the youngest from Western Pomerania (dating from the eleventh to thirteenth century), an area which came under the rule of the Piasts later in the eleventh century. This is of course only a tentative hypothesis, which may be subject to revisions when more examples of prone burials are found.

Spatial location of prone burials within cemeteries

Most prone burials have been discovered in so-called non-churchyard or rural cemeteries (Polish *cmentarzyska pozakościelne/cmentarzyska wiejskie*), which were located at a considerable distance from churches or other places of Christian worship. Previous scholars have argued that the occurrence of atypical burials at these types of sites indicates a high degree of superstition and fear of revenants among rural communities which, despite official conversion, still practised their pagan rites. This idea is not completely improbable, but we must bear in mind that the network of parishes in the period between the eleventh and thirteenth centuries was still largely underdeveloped and therefore, statistically speaking, most cemeteries at that time were located away from places of Christian worship. The fact that atypical burials occur both in churchyard and non-churchyard cemeteries demonstrates that they have many possible interpretations and probably resulted from a wide range of factors, the fear of revenants being just one of them.

Among the most interesting aspects of early medieval prone burials in Poland is that some of them are located in marginal areas of cemeteries. Examples of such 'boundary burials' are known from Lubień (graves 49, 92 and 110) (**Fig. 4.2**), Poznań-Śródka (graves 285 and 292) (**Fig. 4.3**) and Sandomierz (grave 90). Burying people at the borders of cemeteries could indeed signal their 'difference' and might be an attempt to spatially separate them from the rest of the dead. With regard to boundary burials in Anglo-Saxon England, Reynolds argues that they were 'wholly negative, and concerned with the exclusion of social deviants to the limits of territories'.[5] Indeed, boundaries in various cultural

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[5] Reynolds 2009, p. 248.

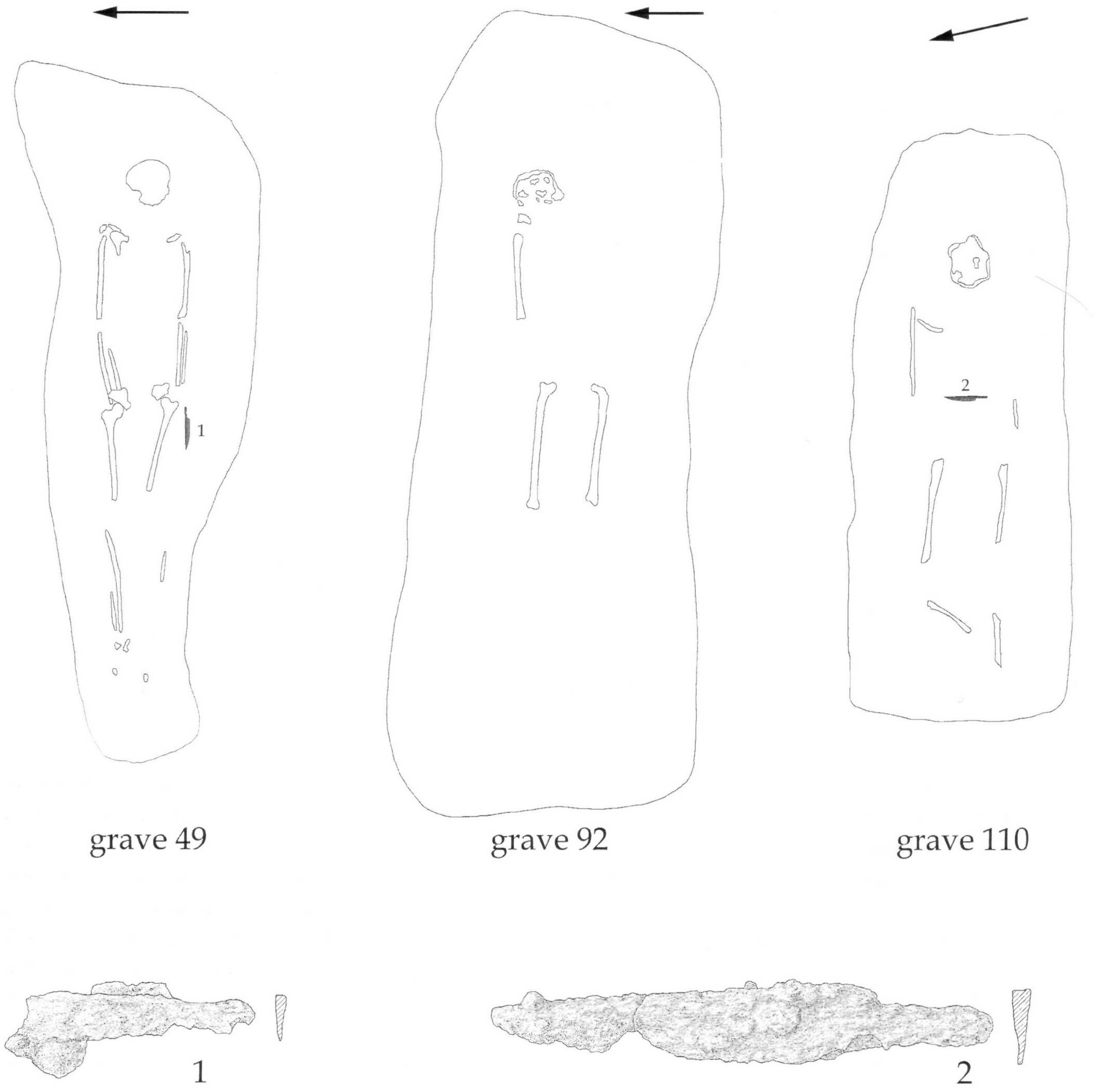

Fig. 4.2. Three prone burials from Lubień (grave 49, 92, 110). Reproduced after Kurasiński, Skóra 2012, plates XXXV, LVIII, LXVII, pp. 243, 266, 275. 1 – knife from grave 49. Reproduced after Kurasiński, Skóra 2012, p. 243. 2 – knife from grave 110. Reproduced after Kurasiński, Skóra 2012, p. 275.

milieus are often considered to be places that are haunted or endowed with special powers,[6] so there is a high degree of probability that at least some of the prone burials in Poland which are located on the boundaries of cemeteries belonged to people who were feared of becoming revenants, or at least that this was a way to separate social deviants from the rest of the dead.

Grave goods in prone burials

Prone burials from early medieval Poland are usually not accompanied by objects, although there are a few notable exceptions to this rule. For example, one woman who was buried prone in the cemetery at Gwiazdowo

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[6] On the meaning of boundaries see, for example, Schmitt 1998, p. 184; Bylina 2012.

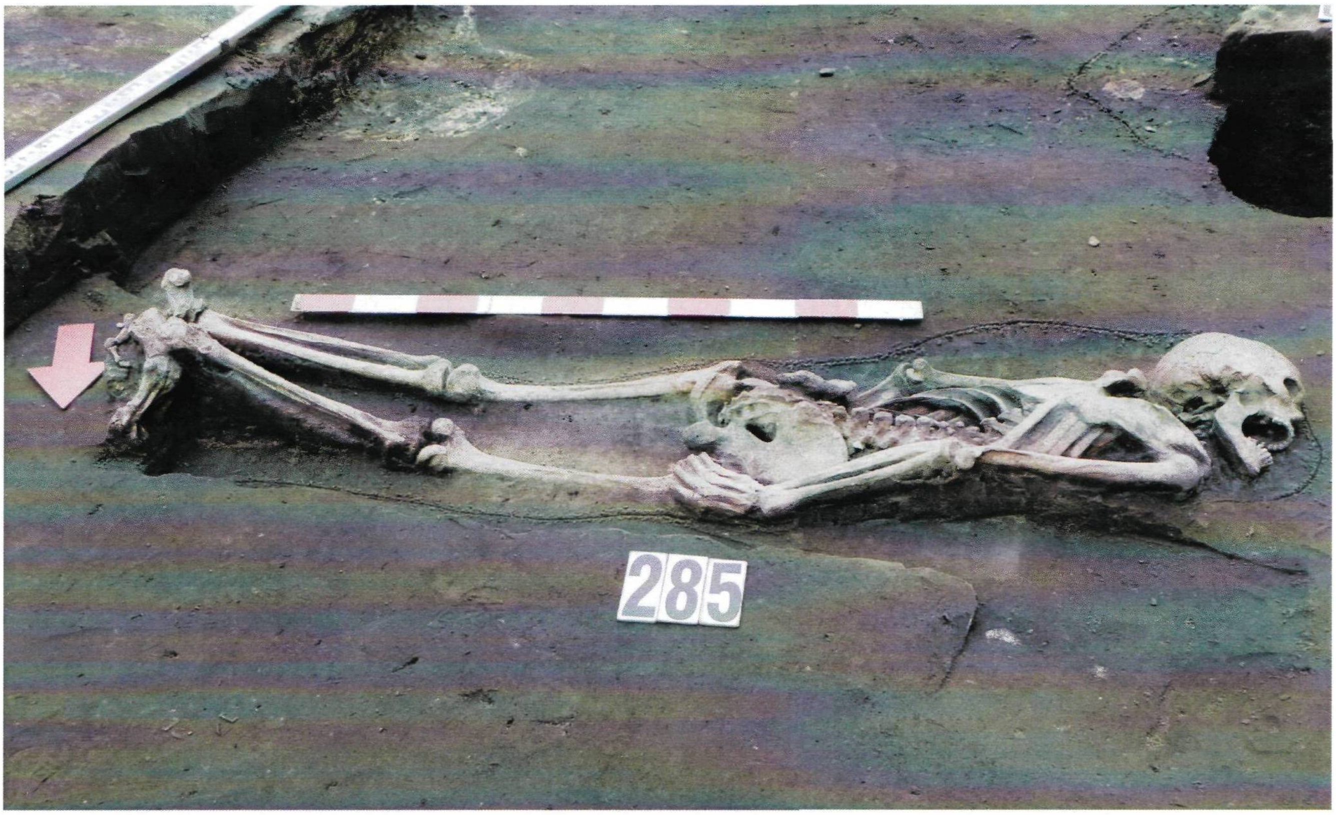

Fig. 4.3. Photo of grave 285 from Poznań-Śródka. After Pawlak, Pawlak 2015, p. 53. Courtesy of Paweł Pawlak.

in Greater Poland had three temple rings made of lead, an iron knife in a scabbard with bronze fittings, an ornamented bronze ring, and a relatively large ring (with a diameter of 2.4cm), possibly made of silver (**Fig. 4.4.**). An iron nail was found in the grave of a mature man buried prone in the cemetery at Niemcza (grave 96). Two prone burials from Lubień had iron knives (graves 49 and 110), and there were some unidentified iron objects that accompanied a female buried prone in the cemetery at Świelubie (grave 5).[7] Finally, one of the three prone burials from Wolin Młynówka (grave 31(96)) contained a small ceramic shard.

The case of the grave from Gwiazdowo is unique as it represents the only atypical burial from the area of Poland that contains a wide repertoire of grave goods. The presence of expensive objects, such as the rings and the knife in a decorated scabbard, might imply that the intention of those who buried the woman was not to prevent her from becoming a revenant but to signal some other, not necessarily negative, meaning. As we shall see below, a number of richly furnished prone burials from Viking Age Scandinavia (which also included knives in decorated scabbards) have been interpreted as those of pious Christians, and it is possible that the grave from Gwiazdowo could also be that of a woman whose prone burial signalled *post-mortem* atonement and/or a particular devotion to God. The major problem with this grave, however, is that it is poorly documented and no plans or photographs of the alignment of the body have ever been published. All of this forces us to interpret it with extreme caution – it may even be the case that this was not a prone burial at all.

The two prone burials from Lubień can also be interpreted in a number of ways. The knives they contained could have been personal possessions of the dead, but it is also possible that they had some other role to play in the funerary drama. We might speculate that if the men at Lubień were punished for committing crimes, then perhaps the knives served as lethal instruments used in their execution.

The indeterminate iron objects in the prone burial from Świelubie[8] and the pottery shard found in the grave from Wolin Młynówka are so uncharacteristic that it

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[7] Łosiński 1972, p. 270.

[8] Łosiński 1972, p. 270.

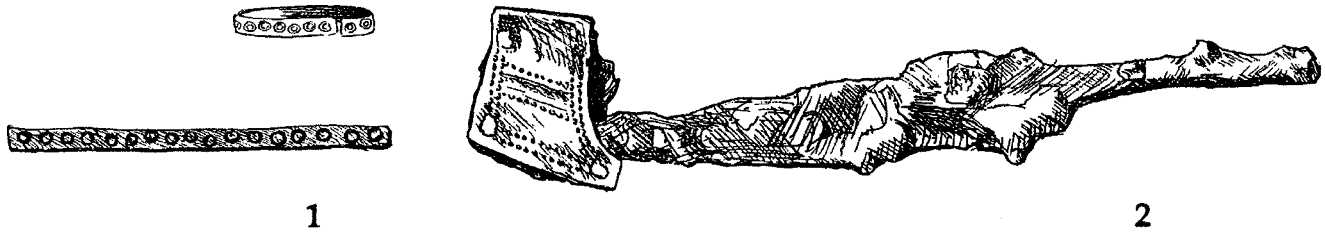

Fig. 4.4. Ornamented ring and an iron knife in a scabbard decorated with copper alloy from Gwiazdowo. Reproduced after Rajewski 1937, plates III and IX.

is difficult to determine what they may have meant in a funerary context. It is equally possible that they do not represent grave goods *per se*, but that they accidentally ended up in the grave during its backfilling.

Prone burials in combination with other atypical practices

In the area of Poland, prone burials rarely coincide with other atypical practices, although in several cases it has been argued that individuals buried prone may have been decapitated. Examples where the head has been found separated from the rest of the skeleton are known from Cedynia (grave 76) (**Fig. 4.5**), Kałdus (grave 24/57) (**Fig. 4.6**) and Wolin Młynówka (grave 15(29)) (**Fig. 4.7** and **Fig. 4.8**). Each of these cases is ambiguous, since it is difficult to determine whether the decapitation was the cause of death or whether it occurred *post-mortem*. What is clear, however, is that none of these graves were reopened, so the act of beheading must have either coincided with the act of burial or occurred before it.

Based on the alignment of the limbs, it is possible that some bodies from prone burials may have been tied or wrapped in shrouds. The graves from Cedynia (76), Ciepłe (12/2005), Gruczno (502) (**Fig. 4.9**), Poznań-Śródka (292), Niemcza (96) (**Fig. 4.10**), Wawrzeńczyce (157) (**Fig. 4.11**) and Wolin Młynówka (189(349)) can be interpreted in this way. The individual buried at Dziekanowice (52/03) had his legs flexed (**Fig. 4.12**).

There are several possible explanations of why people were buried with their limbs tied. One potential explanation is that the binding of the body prevented the dead from leaving the grave. The practice of binding the limbs of potential revenants is attested in nineteenth-century accounts (see below). An alternative interpretation is provided by Andrew Reynolds, who has studied numerous examples of Anglo-Saxon atypical burials. He argues that 'tied hands provide circumstantial evidence that an individual was hanged'.[9] In Anglo-Saxon England, the hands of wrongdoers could be tied in the front or behind the body. As Reynolds observes, with one exception from grave F3 at Castle Hill, all individuals with hands tied in front are male, while three individuals with hands tied behind are female.

In the case of Poland, there is no clear evidence for the tying of hands, but the characteristic position of the lower limbs of the individuals buried at Cedynia (76), Niemcza (96) and Wolin (15(29) and 189(349)) does imply that they had their legs tied. Tying of the legs has been interpreted by some archaeologists as a preventive measure against the walking dead, but comparative evidence shows that an alternative interpretation is possible, namely that these people were hanged upside down. In his monograph, Reynolds provides several textual and iconographic examples of hanging upside down as a form of punishment. The *Harley Psalter*, for example, contains a depiction of an inverted crucifixion, and there are also accounts of Jews being hanged upside down in Germany and Austria during the Middle Ages.[10] In light of this comparative evidence, it seems possible that people buried prone with their legs tied in early medieval cemeteries in Poland were criminals who were punished by hanging. The atypical treatment of their corpses, including their face down interment, could be regarded as result of a hasty burial and/or a sign of disrespect.

Live burials?

One of the most interesting examples of early medieval prone burials from Poland is grave 110 from Stary Zamek, where a female seems to have been additionally held down with three wooden stakes (**Fig. 4.13** and **Fig.**

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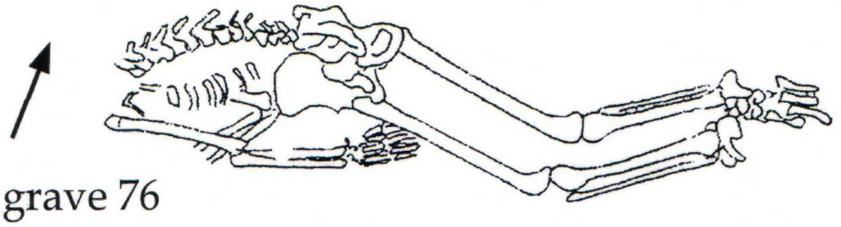
[9] Reynolds 2009, p. 163.

[10] Reynolds 2009, pp. 165–166.



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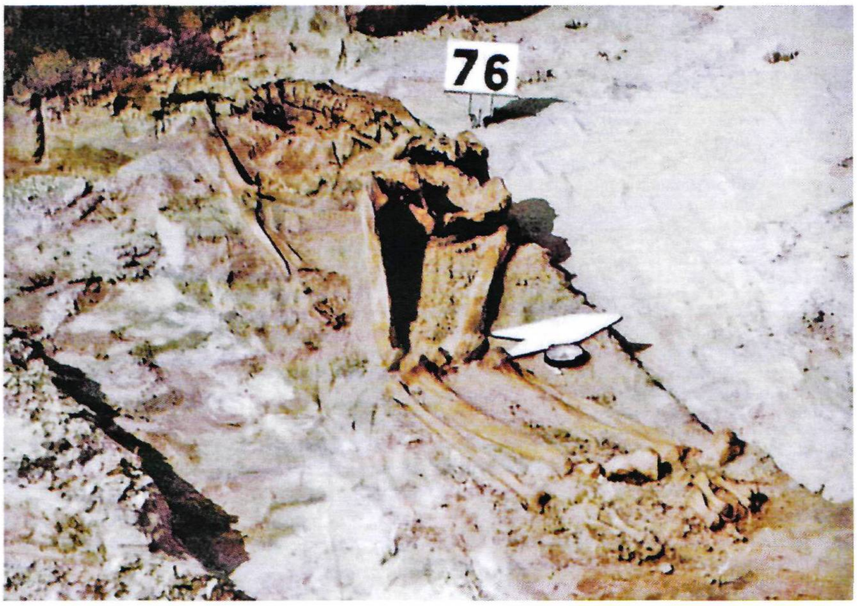

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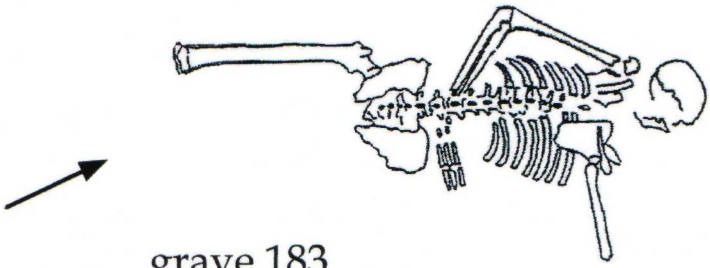

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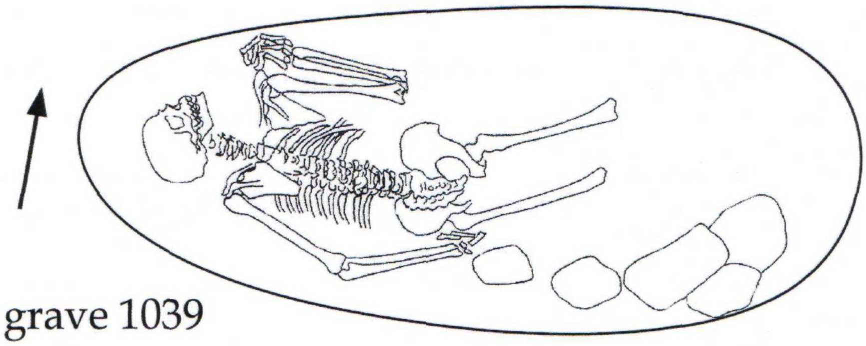

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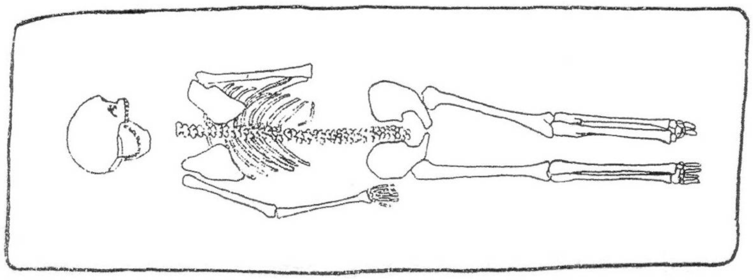
Fig. 4.5. Prone burials from Cedynia. 1a – Plan of grave 76 from Cedynia. Reproduced after Porzeziński 2008, p. 24. 1b – Photo of grave 76 from Cedynia. After Porzeziński 2006, p. 416. 2 – Plan of grave 183 from Cedynia. Reproduced after Porzeziński 2008, p. 26. 3 – Plan of grave 1039 from Cedynia. Reproduced after Porzeziński 2008, p. 36.

grave 24/57



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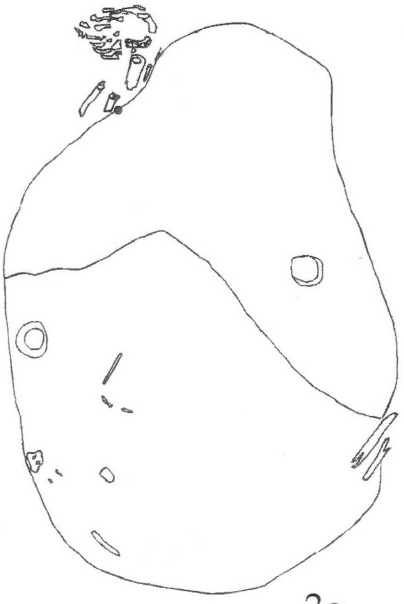

3a

grave 358/02

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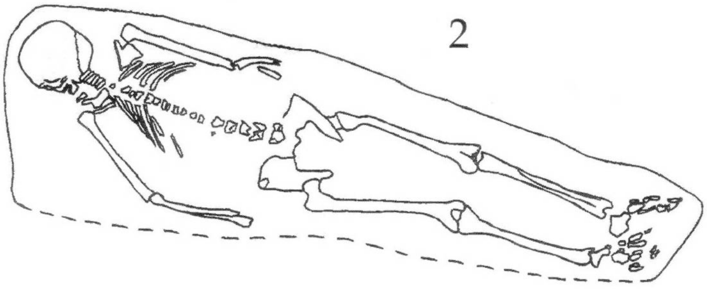
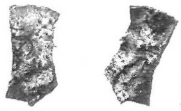


grave 131/01



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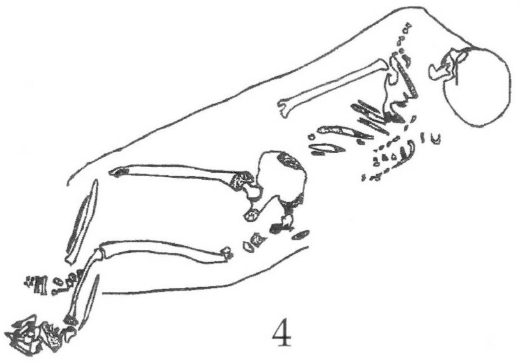

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grave 383/03

Fig. 4.6. Prone burials from Kałdus. 1 – Plan of grave 24/57 from Kałdus. Reproduced after Kaszewska 1960, p. 152. 2 – Plan of grave 131/01. After Bojarski, Chudziak, Drozd, Koperkiewicz, Kozłowski, Stawska 2010, p. 248. 3a – Plan of grave 358/02. After Bojarski, Chudziak, Drozd, Koperkiewicz, Kozłowski, Stawska 2010, p. 311. 3b – Fragment of silver coin from grave 358/02. After Bojarski, Chudziak, Drozd, Koperkiewicz, Kozłowski, Stawska 2010, p. 311. 4 – Plan of grave 383/03. After Bojarski, Chudziak, Drozd, Koperkiewicz, Kozłowski, Stawska 2010, p. 318.

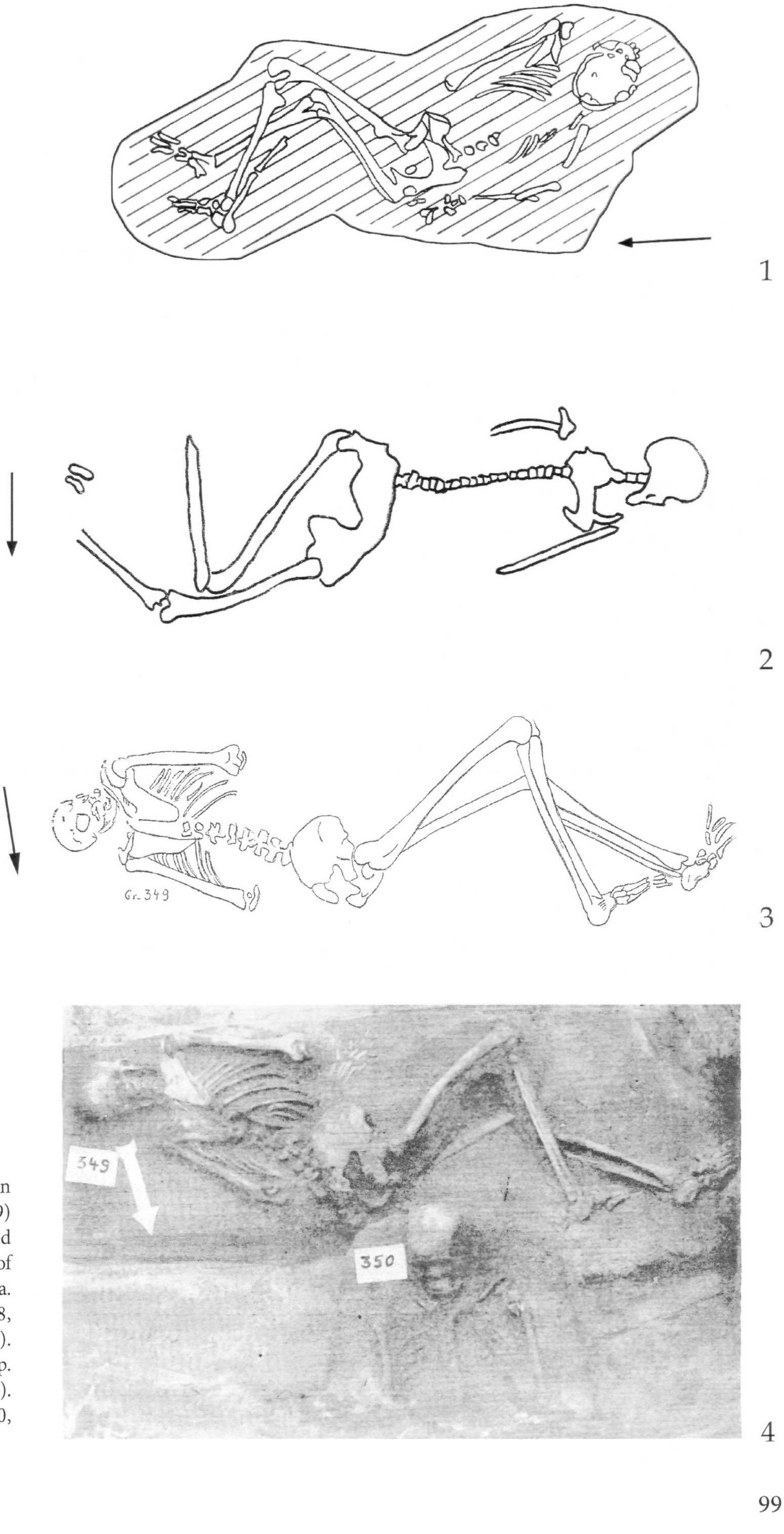

Fig. 4.7. Prone burials from Wolin Młynówka. 1 – Plan of grave 15(29) from Wolin Młynówka. Reproduced after Wojtasik 1968, p. 17. 2 – Plan of grave 31(96) from Wolin Młynówka. Reproduced after Wojtasik 1968, p. 24. 3 – Plan of grave 189(349). Reproduced after Wojtasik 1970, p. 297. 4 – Photo of grave 189(349). Reproduced after Wojtasik 1970, plate I.

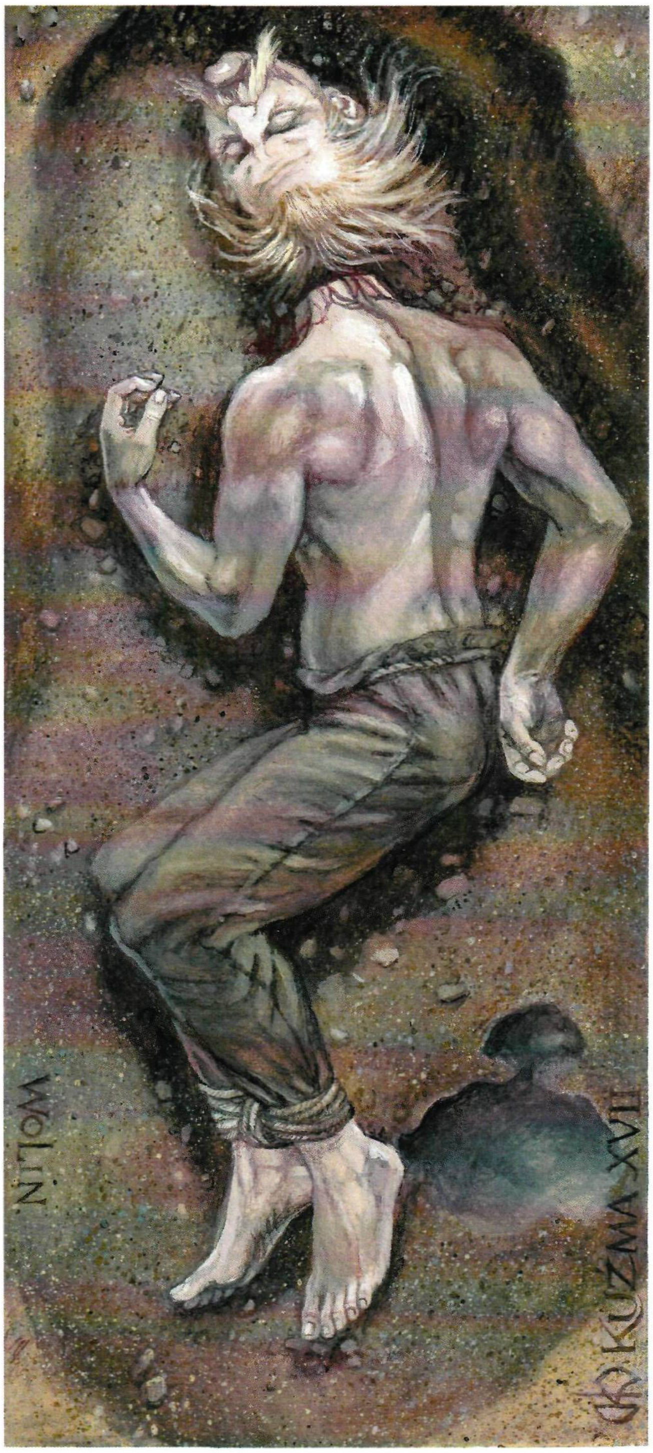

Fig. 4.8. Reconstruction of grave 15(29) from Wolin Młynówka. Illustration by Mirosław Kuźma. Copyright Leszek Gardeła and Mirosław Kuźma. Note that the head of this individual was probably positioned face down, not facing up as shown here in the reconstruction.

4.14).[11] Judging by the position her limbs – the right arm raised over the head and the legs spread widely – it is possible that she was buried alive, and that the stakes were intended to hold her down while the grave was being backfilled.

In this context, it is worth mentioning an interesting case of a live burial of a woman that took place in 1619 near Świdnica in Silesia. Her body was additionally pierced with a stake as a form of punishment for the death of her two children.[12] Although in a chronological sense this event is much younger than the grave from Stary Zamek, it may offer an important clue as to why women were buried this way – perhaps they were being punished for murdering their own children?[13] It is noteworthy that the cemetery at Stary Zamek is located only 40km from Świdnica and such a close proximity of the two places makes it possible that, despite the chronological disparity of over 400 years between the two cases, there was some continuity of forms of punishment and funerary practices in this area.

3. INTERPRETING PRONE BURIALS IN EARLY MEDIEVAL POLAND

Any attempt to interpret prone burials in early medieval Poland is significantly hampered by the fact that many of them were excavated a long time ago and often recorded in a manner which is rudimentary by today's standards.[14] Archival descriptions stored in museums and academic institutions are often very laconic, and preserved field documentation vague or imprecise. In some instances the occurrence of a prone burial at a particular site is only briefly mentioned in reports, and no plans, photographs or other details are provided (this pertains especially to prone burials from Gwiazdowo, Starczewice, and Świelubie). The most recent discoveries of prone burials were made at Ciepłe,[15] Giecz,[16] Wawrzeńczyce[17] and Poznań-Śródka,[18]

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[11] Alternatively, the stakes may have formed part of the grave's internal or external structure.

[12] Duma 2010, p. 116.

[13] Stanaszek 2016a, p. 88 also demonstrates that women who killed their babies were buried alive in Poznań in the fifteenth and sixteenth century. For further details see Maisel 1963, p. 126.

[14] In some instances, photographs of atypical graves are lacking and their plans are only in the form of very schematic sketches. In several field diaries (e.g. from the excavations at Cedynia) to which I had access, the descriptions of inhumation graves are very laconic with only basic information about the alignment of the skeletons and brief remarks about the objects that accompanied them.

[15] Ratajczyk 2011.

[16] Indycka 2005.

[17] Mazur, Mazur 2011.

[18] Pawlak, Pawlak 2015.

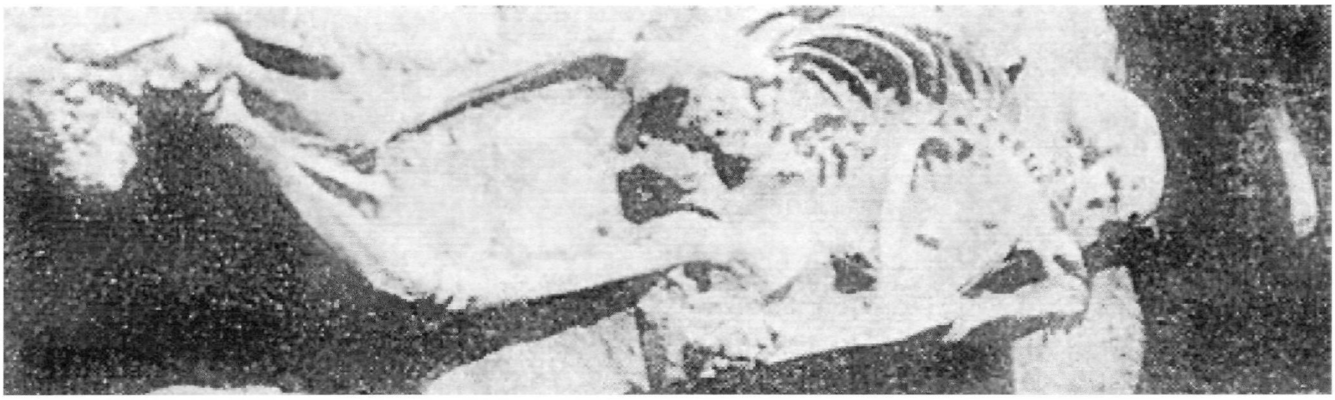

Fig. 4.9. Photo of grave 502 from Gruczno. After Stanaszek 2016b, p. 10.

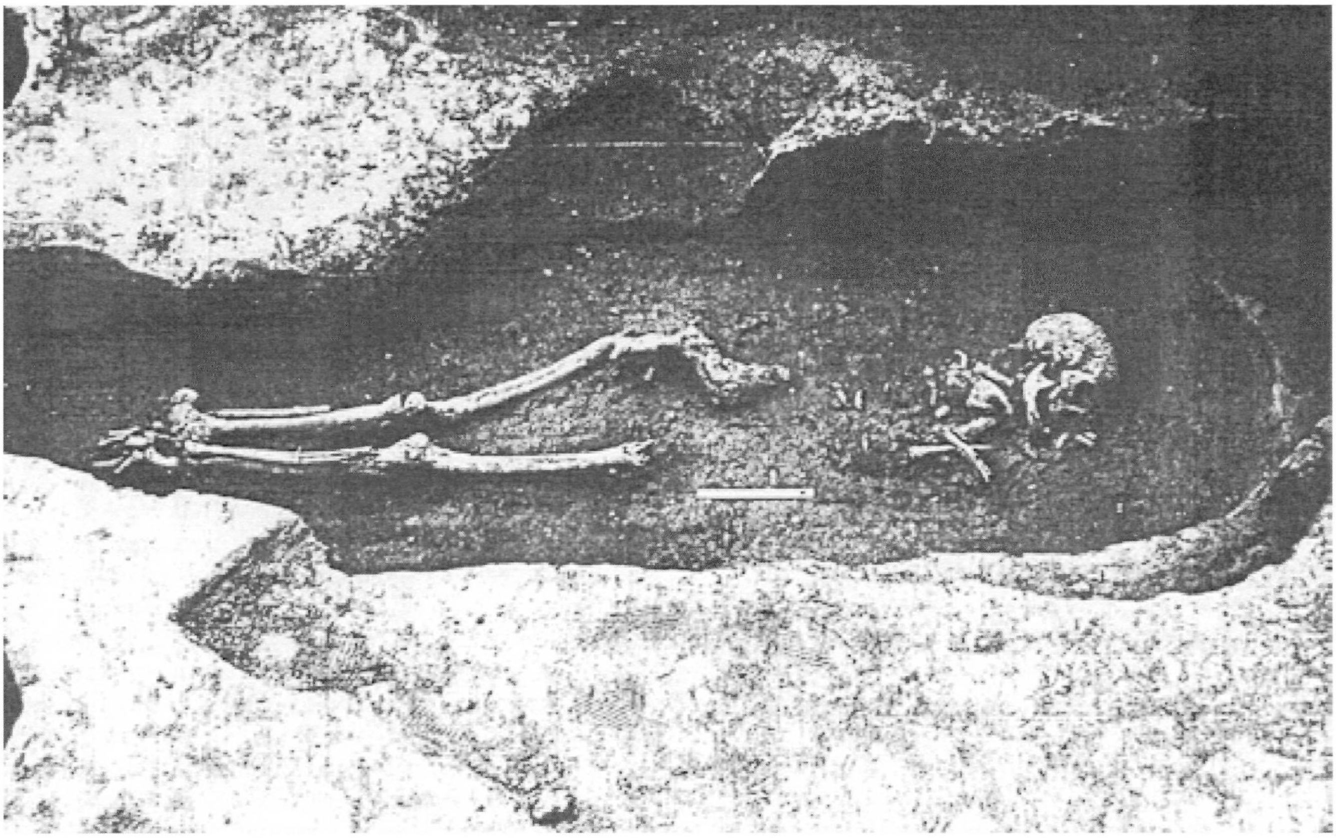

Fig. 4.10. Photo of grave 96 from Niemcza. After Stanaszek 2016b, p. 17.

but these have not been discussed very thoroughly in the excavation reports published so far.

In most studies published in Poland, prone burials have been regarded as belonging to 'vampires' or other kinds of revenants (e.g. *strzygi*, *upiory* etc.), and the act of laying the corpse face down has been interpreted as an attempt to practically and symbolically hold the dead in the grave.[19] However, as I have tried to demonstrate in my preliminary studies, prone burial in early medieval Poland may have had a much wider range of meanings. For example:[20]

- It may have reflected an act of *post-mortem* atonement. The best comparative example is the prone burial of Pepin the Short who wanted to repent the sins of his father by being buried in a prone position.[21]
- It may have been associated with the widespread belief in the so-called evil eye, a malevolent gaze of

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[19] See, for example, Żydok 2004. But see also Kajkowski 2012, who interprets some of the prone burials from Pomerania as human sacrifices.

[20] Gardeła 2011a; 2012a; 2015a; 2015b.

[21] Kyll 1964, p. 175; Reynolds 2009, p. 69; Koperkiewicz 2010, p. 75.

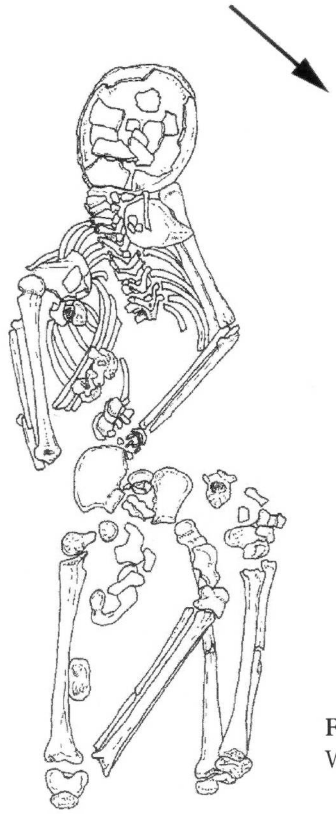

Fig. 4.11. Plan of grave 157 from Wawrzeńczyce. Reproduced after Mazur, Mazur 2011, p. 426.

the dead or dying which could bring misfortune or even death. Various ethnographic sources attest that the idea of the evil eye was known among the Slavs in the nineteenth century. It is possible that this concept had much earlier roots, and that it motivated some of the early medieval prone burials in Poland.[22]

- It may have reflected fear of something coming out of the body or entering the body through various orifices (e.g. the mouth).[23]
- It may have resulted from clumsy and hasty funerary procedures (for example during a plague).
- It may have reflected an attempt to condemn the dead (and perhaps also the members of their family who participated in the funeral).
- Some prone burials could be those of people buried alive.
- Perhaps in some instances prone burials were intended for foreigners and people who did not belong to the society that orchestrated the funeral. In this way, through the act of prone burial, their difference would be clearly marked.

The examples above demonstrate that prone burials can be interpreted in a number of ways and, given their diversity, it is quite probable that in early medieval Poland there was never one overarching idea that stood behind such practices. Before we move further in our attempts to interpret them, let us take closer look at records of prone burials preserved in Polish ethnographic accounts.

Prone burials in Polish ethnographic accounts

In a range of studies by renowned Polish ethnographers and archaeologists, such as Adam Fischer,[24] Bonifacy Zielonka,[25] Oskar Kolberg,[26] Wojciech Łysiak,[27] and Łukasz Maurycy Stanaszek,[28] we find a number of descriptions of prone burials from the nineteenth and twentieth century. Below is a list of some of the most evocative examples:

- Adam Fischer writes that, in Białobrzegi, when someone commits suicide they are decapitated and buried face down with their head between their legs. Interestingly, Fischer observes that a person who commits suicide is buried in this way in a coffin.[29]
- Bonifacy Zielonka discusses a document known as *Casus de strigis*, which describes an event that took place in 1674 in Trzeszawa, Poland. A man who had risen from his grave was seen choking other people and drinking their blood. The local community considered him to be a *strzyga*. As a result, a priest decided to reopen his grave and turn the body face down. This did not solve the problem, however, and the man still continued to haunt the living. The grave was therefore reopened again the man's head was cut off with a spade.[30]
- In an ethnographic volume about folk customs from the former provinces of Rzeszów and Tarnów, Oskar Kolberg describes a belief in people who allegedly had two sprits/souls inside them, one of which was good

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[22] On the idea of the evil eye among the Slavs, see Fischer 1921, pp. 119–126; Kowalczyk 1968, pp. 123–124; Pełka 1960, p. 161. It also appears to have been known among Viking Age Scandinavians as is suggested by a range of Old Norse textual accounts and archaeological evidence. For a more detailed discussion, see Gardeła 2013c, pp. 104–107, 116. For general studies on the evil eye, see Hocart 1938; Dundes 1991.

[23] In Slavic folkloristic beliefs, the human soul is associated with breath and could leave (or enter) the body through the mouth or other orifices (e.g. through the nose while sneezing). On this notion see, for example, Pełka 1960, p. 162. In some past societies, witches were also buried face down because of the fear that their soul could leave their bodies through the mouth – for further details, see Kyll 1964, p. 179.

[24] Fischer 1921, pp. 355–356.

[25] Zielonka 1957.

[26] Kolberg 1967, p. 270.

[27] Łysiak 1993.

[28] Stanaszek 2016a, pp. 75–76.

[29] Fischer 1921, pp. 355–356.

[30] Zielonka 1957.

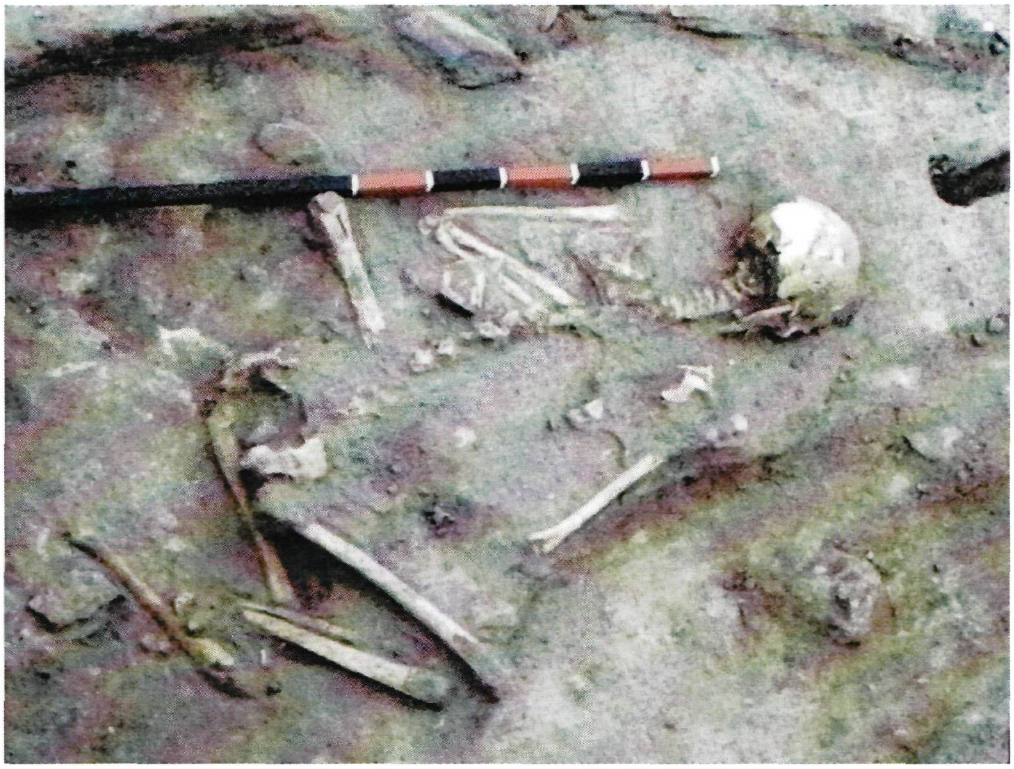

Fig. 4.12. Photo of grave 52/03 from Dziekanowice. After Buko 2011, fig. 48. Courtesy of Jacek Wrzesiński.

and the other bad. According to popular belief, when people with two spirits/souls died, they had a tendency to rise from their graves and haunt or hurt others. The best remedy to stop their malevolence was to reopen the graves and turn the coffin upside down. This ensured that the dead would 'dig their way further into the ground'. Sometimes, Kolberg writes, such revenants were additionally decapitated.[31]

- According to an ethnographic account from Radom, when a revenant poses a threat to the society, his grave should be exhumed and the body turned face down to make him 'walk deeper into the ground and not haunt the living'.[32]
- Wojciech Łysiak mentions a custom whereby the grave of a revenant is reopened and the body turned face down. He also writes that sometimes a sickle was placed on the neck of the deceased and a coin put between the teeth to prevent the dead from rising.[33]
- An interesting revenant story has been recorded by a certain Paweł Szymański. He described a funeral that took place in 1914 and in which his grandmother, Rozalia Szymańska, participated as a child. The revenant from Szymański's story was a man called Frelek, an old bachelor and troublemaker. After his funeral strange things began to happen – dogs ran away to the fields, and disturbing noises were heard at night. A local priest decided to reopen the grave and soon realised that inside the coffin the deceased man had turned face down and 'was eating himself' because his fingers were all devoid of skin. Upon seeing this, the locals decided to cut Frelek's head off and placed it between his legs. This gruesome act was conducted in the presence of the priest who at the same time conducted his prayers.[34]
- In his monograph, Stanaszek discusses an interesting case of a prone burial recorded in the newspaper *Kuryer Codzienny* in 1869. The story took place in Bodzentyn where a deceased woman allegedly haunted her husband. In order to stop these hauntings, he reopened her grave, turned her body face down and tied her hands. This did not solve the problem, however, and the grave had to be reopened one more time. The man then cut off his wife's head and buried it separately from the rest of her body.[35]

All of these ethnographic accounts demonstrate that prone burials were intended to prevent *post-mortem* activity of the 'suspicious' dead. The act of prone burial is consistently portrayed as a practice which carried negative connotations, suitable for dealing with troublemakers, wrongdoers and suicides. In my survey of ethnographic literature from Poland, I have found no examples of prone burials which can be interpreted as signalling something positive.

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[31] Kolberg 1967, p. 270.

[32] Kowalczyk 1968, p. 83; see also Stanaszek 2016a, p. 75.

[33] Łysiak 1993.

[34] Szymański 2000.

[35] Stanaszek 2016a, p. 75.

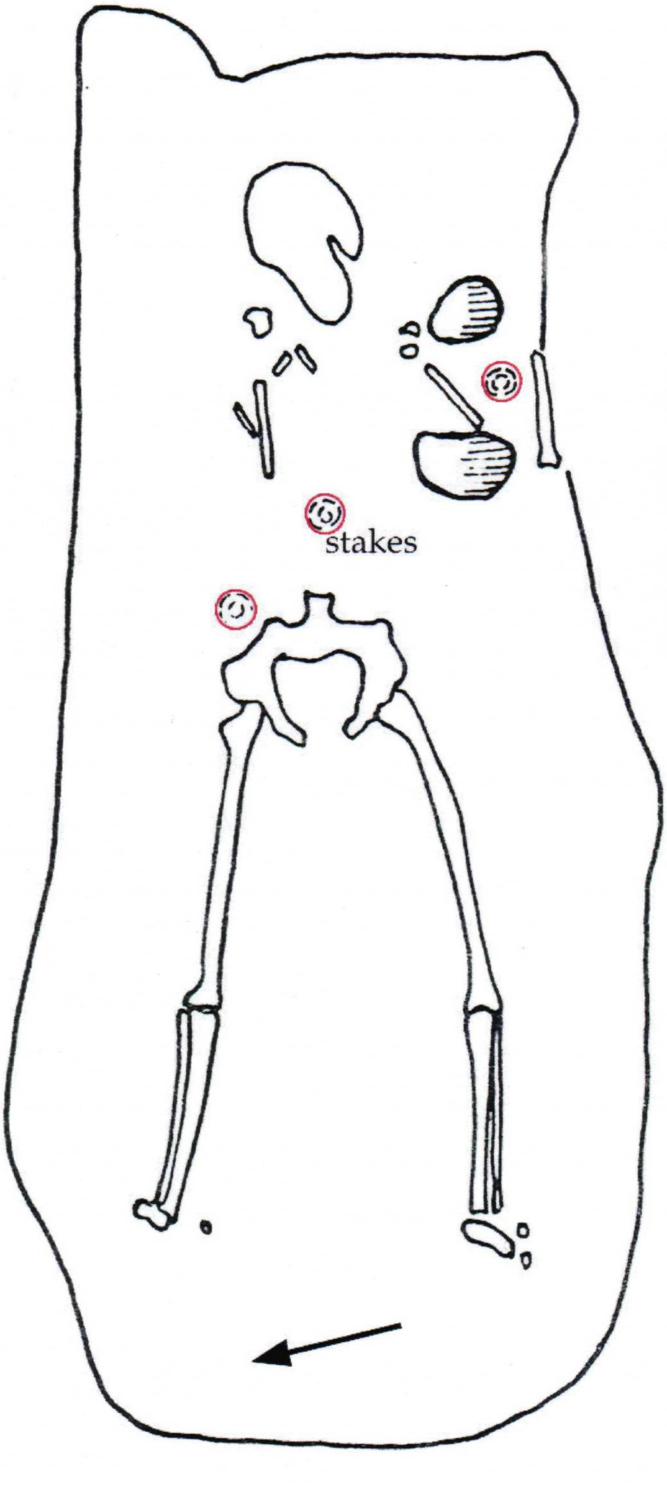

Fig. 4.13. Grave 110 from Stary Zamek. Reproduced after Wachowski 1992, p. 90.

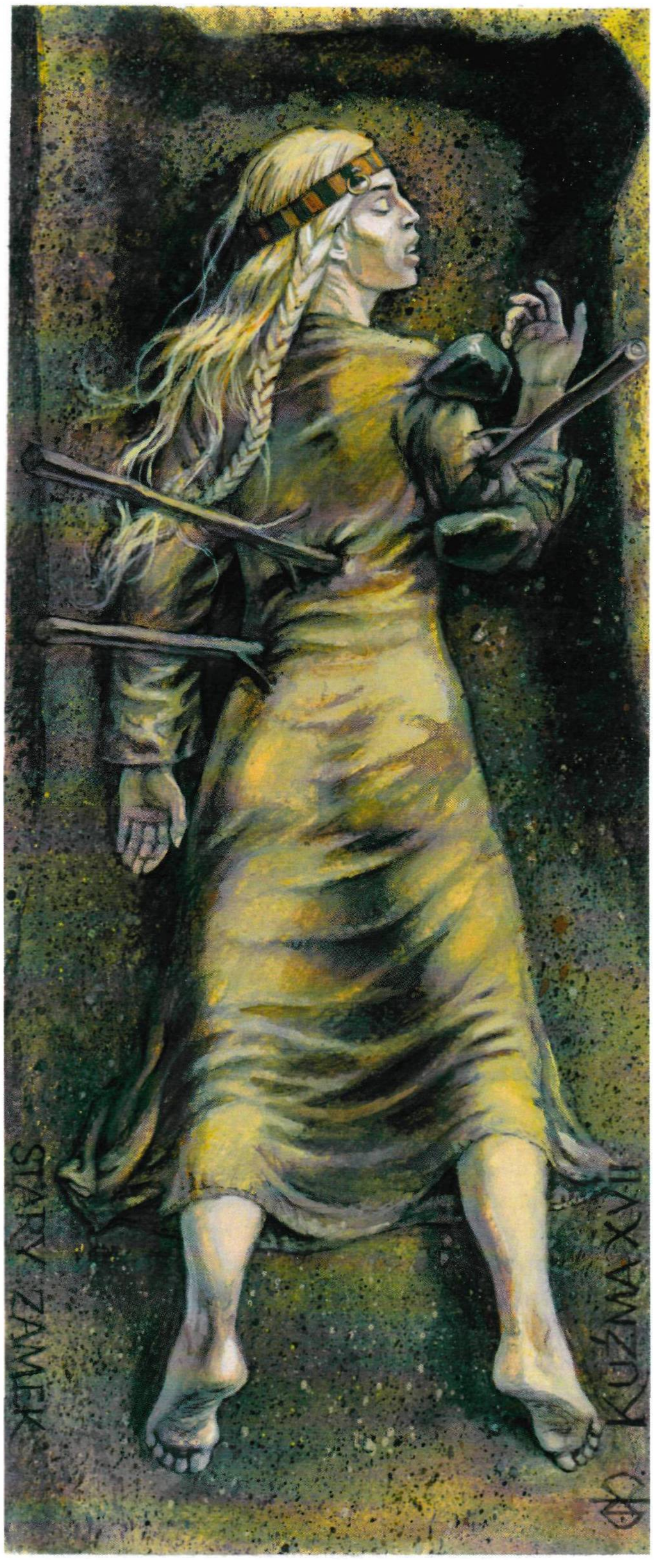
STARY ZAMEK
KUŹMA XVII

Fig. 4.14. Reconstruction of grave 110 from Stary Zamek. Illustration by Mirosław Kuźma. Copyright by Leszek Gardeła and Mirosław Kuźma.

Although the sources cited above have often been used 'retrospectively' to interpret the phenomenon of prone burials in early medieval Poland as reflecting a fear of revenants, one very important detail seems to have been overlooked in scholarly debates. In most instances from Polish ethnography that I am aware of (perhaps with the exception of the suicides recorded by Adam Fischer and the revenant in Paweł Szymański's story about Frelek), the act of burying the deceased in a prone position occurs *after* reopening the grave and not during the initial funeral. In addition to laying the body prone, the head is sometimes cut off, the hands tied, or a sharp object placed on the neck. As we have seen, some prone burials from Poland also showed evidence of decapitation (for example Cedynia grave 76, Kałdus grave 24/57 and Wolin Młynówka grave 15(29)) or of tied of limbs, but nothing at all implies that these acts were conducted *after* reopening.[36] Instead, everything seems to suggest that the dead were buried prone from the outset, which compels us to question the assumption that prone burial was intended as a measure to prevent a revenant from rising. Of course, it is also possible that the people from Cedynia, Kałdus and Wolin Młynówka had originally been buried somewhere else (in a normative way), and then, after some time, were exhumed, moved to a new grave pit and laid prone, but there is no way to prove this archaeologically. All this shows that there is no precise correlation between the ethnographic accounts and archaeological evidence from early medieval times, so we should be much more cautious in our claims. Some promising new perspectives for interpreting these atypical funerary phenomena may present themselves when we take a closer look at the meanings attributed to prone burials in other cultural milieus.

4. COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVES

Among the most thorough and intercultural studies of prone burials is a recent publication of Caroline Arcini.[37] She observes that prone burial is a very old practice, with the earliest recorded example in the Czech Republic dating from the Stone Age.[38] Arcini rightly notes that there is a common misconception among scholars that prone burials represent an unusual form of funerary behaviour. This conviction stems from the fact that no attempts have been made to discuss them systematically and in different cultural contexts. Arcini's survey from 2009 shows that prone burials are recorded from at least 215 burial sites all over the world and that the total number of individuals buried in this manner is at least 600. Below is a list of the general tendencies which she has observed:

- Men, women and children have all been found buried prone.
- Most prone burials are single, but they may occasionally occur in double or multiple graves.
- Graves with people buried in a prone position are often shallow and usually do not contain any grave goods.
- Prone burials are often isolated, but occasionally they may occur in concentrations. They are sometimes located in marginal parts of cemeteries.
- The frequency of prone burial tends to grow around the Roman Period and this trend persists until the end of the Viking Age.

Arcini's detailed and cross-cultural investigation has enabled her to offer a number of explanations for prone burials in various cultural milieus. It is worth citing her interpretations as they supplement some of my previous studies and observations in an interesting way. In her opinion, people buried face down may have been:

- *Criminals and prisoners* (as suggested by beheadings and tied limbs, in combination with burial in a prone position, or legs bent at the knees and feet tied to the buttocks). It is unclear, however, what types of crime may have resulted in prone burials; the majority of people buried in this way do not have any traces of trauma on the skeleton (which does not rule out the possibility that they were killed/executed – they may have been strangled, stabbed, poisoned, etc.). The idea that prisoners may have been buried face down is suggested by the occurrence of prone burials in a prisoner cemetery located outside Oxford Castle dating to the sixteenth and seventeenth century. Interestingly, among the people buried prone was a subadult whose legs had been tied up behind him.[39]
- *Children who atoned for their parents adultery and immoral people* – this idea is well supported by the oldest written account of a prone burial (i.e. that of

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[36] For a preliminary overview of reopened graves from early medieval Poland, see Gardeła, Kajkowski, Szczepanik 2015. It is noteworthy that *none* of the reopened graves that we have examined contained individuals buried in a prone position. I will return to this problem in Chapter 7.

[37] Arcini 2009.

[38] Arcini 2009, pp. 187–188; see also Kyll 1964, p. 173 for further examples of prone burials from the Stone Age.

[39] This makes an interesting parallel (albeit chronologically much younger) to the find from Wawrzeńczyce (see above) where a child was buried prone in a similar manner.

Pepin the Short, who atoned for the sins of his father). Arcini also argues that some children buried prone may have been excluded from the religious community because they died before receiving baptism.

- *People who were buried carelessly.*
- *People who committed suicide* – prone burial in the case of suicides is attested in twentieth-century Korea, where women who could not cope with living in a strictly patriarchal society decided to kill themselves. In order to mark their difference and unusual death, they were buried face down.
- *Individuals who died outdoors or in their sleep.*
- *Injured people.*
- *People buried alive* – in addition to intentional acts of live burial, some prone burials may also be those of people who were only apparently dead (e.g. as a result of cataleptic trance), and after the funeral suddenly woke up in the grave but failed to escape.
- *People with supernatural abilities* – in the case of burials of ritual specialists, one explanation is that prone burial ensures that their energy or soul would not escape through their mouth. As we have seen, this idea might potentially find its reflection in Slavic folklore and relate to the belief in people who had two spirits/souls.
- *People with low status.*

Towards the end of her survey of prone burials, Arcini writes that she has 'not found any reference suggesting that this behaviour was a positive act for the deceased or for the family'.[40] She also notes that prone burials, for example in Britain, occurred with increased frequency at a time of great transformation (e.g. migrations) and may perhaps reflect social and religious tensions and interactions (not always peaceful ones). Arcini concludes her study with the following observation on the custom of prone burial:

> It indicates the collective and unconscious conception as to the treatment of people who deviated from the perceived norms of society. There may of course be several underlying causes depending on the specific historical context, yet there is a clear pattern indicating that prone burials were used for those who were different.[41]

The ideas of Arcini, although in many regards innovative and more nuanced than previous one-sided interpretations, can be expanded even further. In order to do so, we shall now examine the results of some new research on prone burials in Viking Age Scandinavia and in Anglo-Saxon England.

Prone burials in Viking Age Scandinavia

Overall, prone burial seems to have been a very rare funerary practice in Viking Age Scandinavia – that is in the period spanning the eighth and eleventh centuries.[42] Nevertheless, a fair amount of diversity is observed within the prone burials that have been discovered so far, implying that the practice may have held various meanings. Among the best-known and most widely debated examples of prone burials from Denmark are grave 55 from Lejre (Sjælland) and grave P from Bogøvej (Langeland).

Grave 55 from Lejre represents a special variant of double graves where the deceased were buried superimposed, one above the other (**Fig. 4.15**).[43] The upper individual was a decapitated man, buried in a prone position and with a large stone at the feet. At the time of death he was around 35–45 years old. The alignment of his upper and lower limbs suggests that they had been tied. Under a 20cm thick layer of soil, directly below this individual, was another man buried in a supine position. This grave has puzzled scholars for a long time but the general consensus is that it represents a burial of a master and his slave, the slave being the decapitated man lying in a prone position.[44] A very similar instance of a double grave is also seen in grave F at Kumle Høje, another Viking Age cemetery in Denmark. Here also, two men were buried superimposed, the upper lying prone and the lower supine. A remarkable aspect of this grave is that the heads of both individuals had been cut off. This grave is usually interpreted as belonging to two executed convicts.[45]

In grave P at Bogøvej (Langeland, Denmark), an adult man was buried in a prone position and his body covered with two stones (**Fig. 4.16**). The largest of these stones lay on the pelvis and the other on the left arm. The only object found in this grave was a knife, which had been stuck vertically in the ground at the feet of the deceased. In previous studies, I have suggested that the act of thrusting the knife in the ground might allude

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[40] Arcini 2009, p. 196.

[41] Arcini 2009, p. 197.

[42] See examples of prone burials from Lejre, Muldbjerg and Trelleborg in Denmark in Sellevold, Hansen, Jørgensen 1984, pp. 76–77, 88, 131. Prone burials from Kopparsvik in Gotland are extensively discussed in the works of Toplak 2015; 2016.

[43] Ramskou 1965, p. 85; Sellevold, Hansen, Jørgensen 1984, pp. 76–77; Andersen 1995, pp. 14, 24, 97, 138–139; Thäte 2007, p. 268; Gardeła 2013b, pp. 111–113.

[44] Gardeła 2013b, p. 111; 2013c, p. 111.

[45] Thäte 2007, p. 268; Gardeła 2013b, p. 113; 2013c, p. 112.

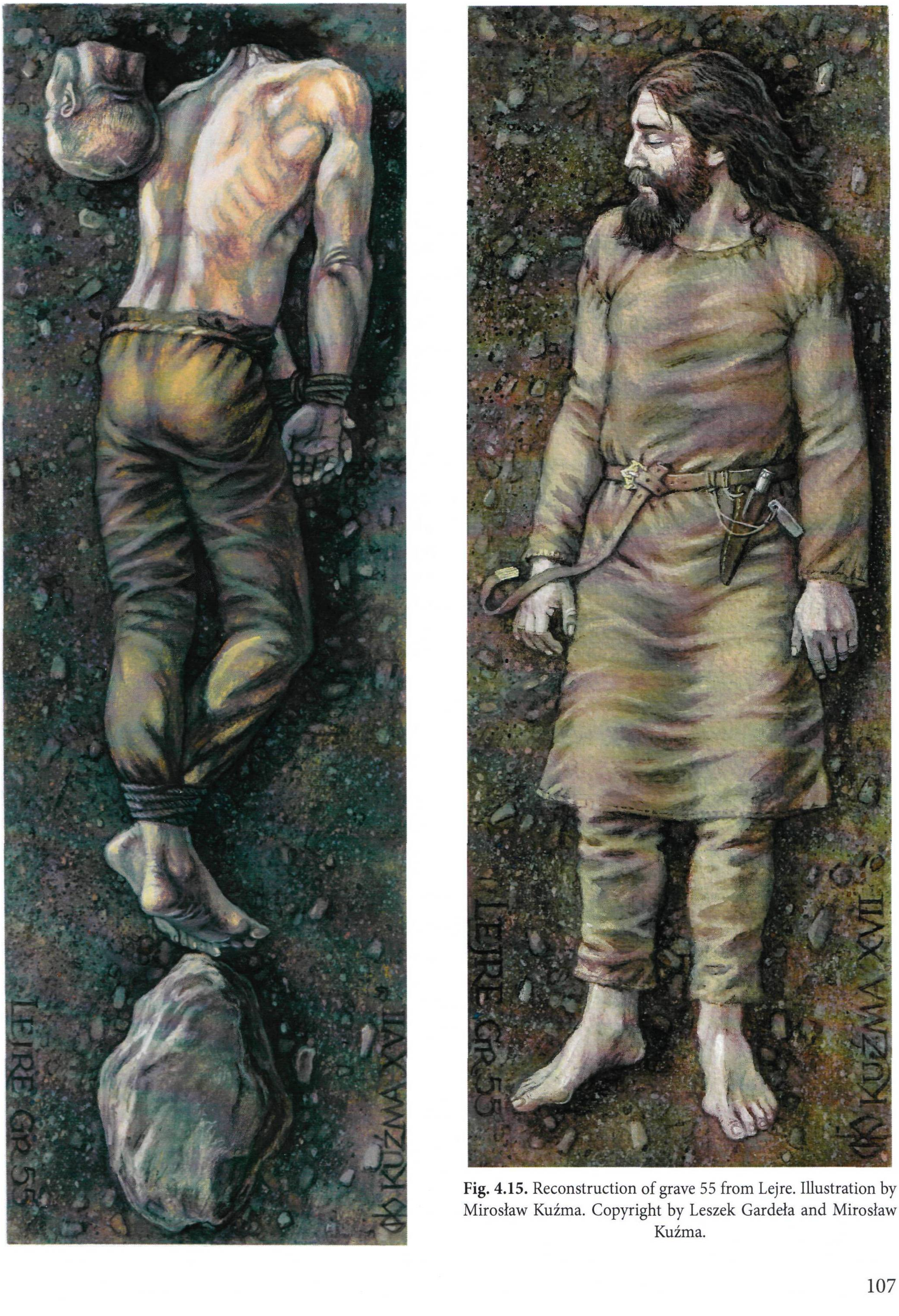
LEJRE GR 55
KUŹMA XVII
LEJRE GR 55
KUŹMA XVII

Fig. 4.15. Reconstruction of grave 55 from Lejre. Illustration by Mirosław Kuźma. Copyright by Leszek Gardeła and Mirosław Kuźma.

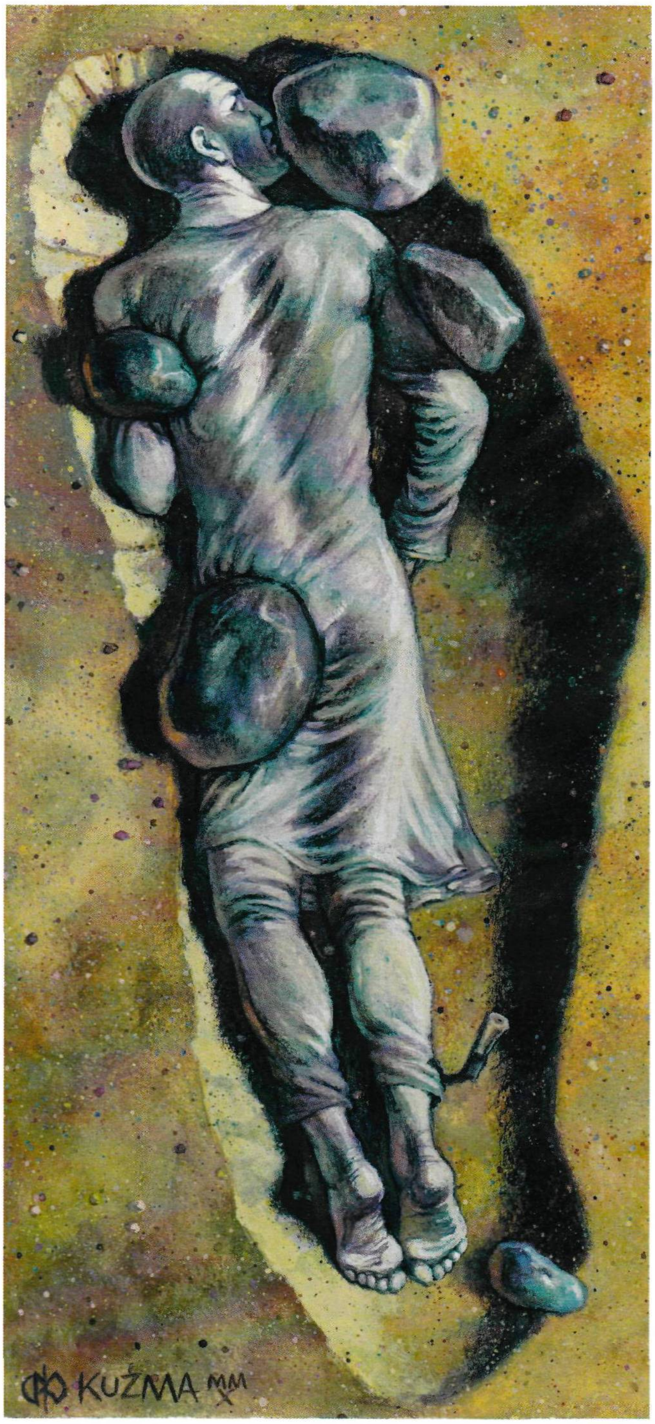

Fig. 4.16. Reconstruction of grave P from Bogøvej. Illustration by Mirosław Kuźma. Copyright by Leszek Gardeła and Mirosław Kuźma.

to a ritual, in which the body was marked with a sharp weapon (usually a spear) to dedicate it to Óðinn. This grave is unique and particularly interesting, since it combines three atypical acts – prone burial, stoning and thrusting a knife in the ground. Taken collectively, these signs suggest that this was an individual whom the local society feared and took pains to ensure would stay in his grave. Given the presence of the stones – which in Old Norse literature are often used in executions of malevolent sorcerers (see Chapter 6) – it is quite likely that the man from Bogøvej was engaged in magic practices.[46]

A substantial number of prone burials have also been noted on Gotland, where they seem to have held various meanings, not limited to a fear of revenants. The most detailed analysis of Gotlandic prone burials was undertaken by Matthias Toplak in both his doctoral dissertation and a separate article.[47]

Toplak provides a thorough analysis of the Viking Age cemetery at Kopparsvik, one of the largest on Gotland, with around 330 graves dating between 900 and 1050 AD.[48] Among the most remarkable aspects of this site is that it included around 50 prone burials (**Fig. 4.17**). Most were male and the majority were interred along the shoreline. What is particularly interesting about the prone burials from Kopparsvik is that they differ considerably from other graves of this type, not only in Scandinavia but also in the wider early medieval world. None of the dead buried prone at Kopparsvik had been beheaded, covered with stones, or interred in a flexed position. On the contrary, many of the deceased were lavishly equipped, their graves containing fibulae, belts and knives. It is also noteworthy that the individuals buried prone lay among the 'normal' dead, and there is nothing to suggest their separation from the rest of the dead within the cemetery. As Toplak argues:

> Due to their disproportionately high number and the often carefully arranged interment of the deceased, the prone burials at Kopparsvik should not be regarded as something 'deviant', but as a variance of the norm which in most cases seems to indicate an actively intended burial-rite with a cultural or religious significance and conferring a special identity.[49]

In Toplak's opinion, the prone burials at Kopparsvik should therefore be seen as belonging to people who wanted to show humility before God, displaying:

> (…) a form of piety which is still visible in the Orthodox and ultraconservative Catholic Church in the so-called 'Metanie' or 'Proskynese', a prostration in front of the altar.[50]

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[46] Grøn, Krag, Bennike 1994, pp. 14–15; Gardeła 2013c, p. 115.

[47] Toplak 2015; 2016.

[48] Toplak 2015, p. 77.

[49] Toplak 2015, p. 79.

[50] Toplak 2015, p. 79.

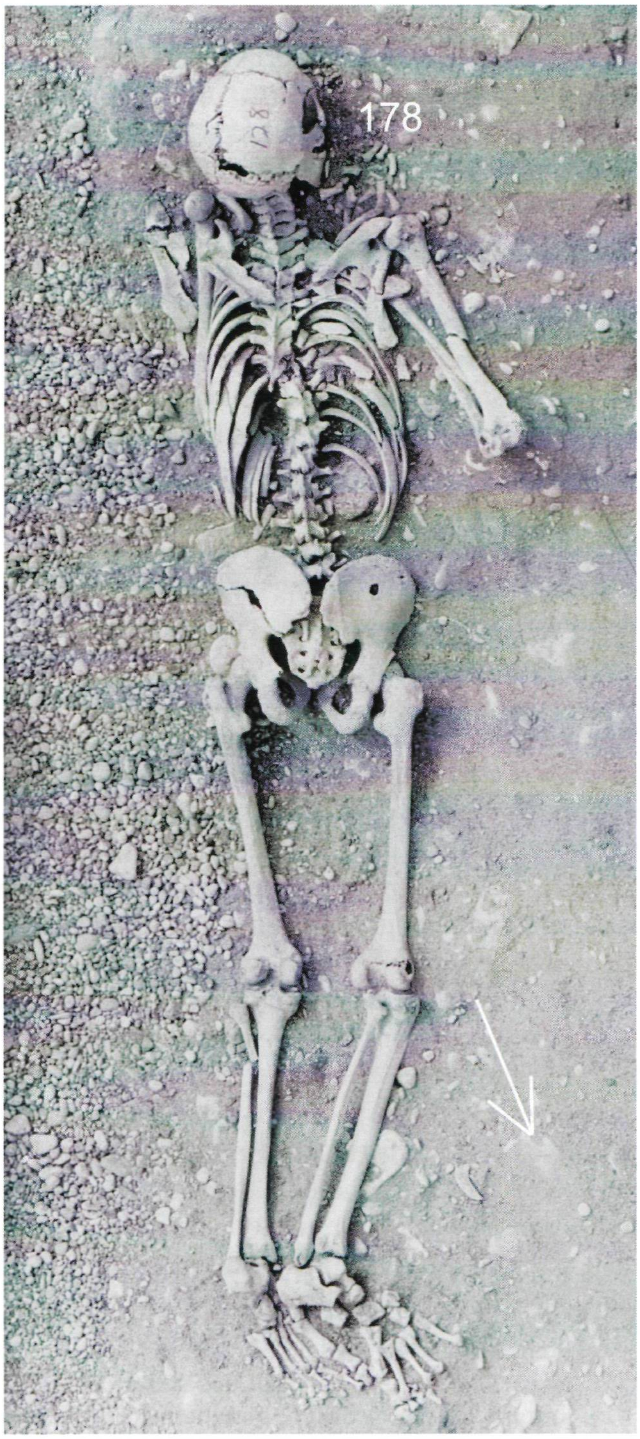

Fig. 4.17. Photo of grave 178 from Kopparsvik. A man buried in a prone position. After Toplak 2015, p. 80. Used by kind permission.

Alternatively, they can be interpreted as the burials of catechumens who had received the rite of 'Primesigning', but died before the sacrament of baptism.

Toplak's interpretation is highly convincing, especially given the fact that one of the graves at Kopparsvik contained a Christian object – a cross pendant. What is more, *Guta saga* mentions that, in the tenth century, a church stood in what is today Visby, strongly implying the existence of a consolidated Christian community in the area of Kopparsvik.[51] It is also worthy of note that many of the prone burials at Kopparsvik were located along the shoreline. As such, they could be considered as 'boundary burials', yet in this case without negative connotations. As Toplak demonstrates on the basis of one of the passages of the law known as *Grágas*, the burials of people who died without baptism were to be located in a place where consecrated and unconsecrated ground met – the shoreline would have been ideal for this.[52]

Altogether, the remarkable case of Kopparsvik forces us to reconsider the meanings of some of the prone burials in Poland as well, especially those that have been found in cemeteries located close to churches. It also adds a whole new dimension to the more general debate on this kind of funerary behaviour.

Prone burials in Anglo-Saxon England

Evidence for prone burial in Anglo-Saxon England both before and after the conversion has recently been extensively discussed by Andrew Reynolds.[53] As for prone burials from the pagan period, which spans from the fifth to the seventh century, Reynolds has recorded a hundred and fifteen examples from sixty cemeteries. Among them, fifty-two are female burials, thirty-seven are male and in the case of eleven graves it has not been possible to determine the sex of the deceased.[54] As many as sixty-seven of these burials contained objects, usually knives, but some graves also included brooches, beads, buckles and vessels (e.g. a pewter bowl). Interestingly, some of the men buried prone had weapons in their graves, such as spears and shield bosses.

In Anglo-Saxon archaeology, females buried prone have often been interpreted as the so-called 'cunning women' who engaged in magic and other ritual practices. Indeed, some of these female prone burials – for example those from Sewerby and Broughton Lodge (grave 105) – were furnished with objects that could have had an amuletic role.[55]

Anglo-Saxon prone burials rarely display any deviant attributes other than burying the dead face down. There are, however, several instances of possibly tied limbs and two cases of prone and decapitated individuals. Several individuals buried face down also had stones on their bodies and there are two examples of amputations.[56]

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[51] For an edition and translation of *Guta saga*, see Peel 1999.

[52] Toplak 2015, pp. 81–82.

[53] Reynolds 2009, pp. 68–76. See also the important work of Hirst 1985, pp. 38–42.

[54] Hirst 1985, pp. 38–42; Reynolds 2009, p. 72.

[55] Reynolds 2009, pp. 73–74.

The practice of prone burial in Anglo-Saxon England did not cease with the conversion, but continued in later centuries. In Reynolds' opinion, such interments had negative connotations. He has identified fifty-one examples from seventeen sites.[57] From the Christian period, between the seventh and eleventh centuries, among the individuals buried in a prone position whose sex could be identified, twenty-two were male and only nine female. Prone burials coincided with other special practices, such as the tying of hands (twenty-two examples) or ankles, amputations, placing stones on the bodies, or decapitation. As Reynolds concludes:

> (...) in the Christian period offences involving superstition, witchcraft, and sorcery are likely motivators for prone burial, and explain the greater effort sometimes evident in such burials beyond the aspect of the corpse itself (...) The role of the prone aspect, however, is likely to represent a continuation of earlier pre-Christian practice designed to safely lay the corpses of the 'powerful' dead.[58]

It seems that, in Reynolds' opinion, prone burials from Anglo-Saxon England were mainly those of people who had been involved in malevolent magic or criminals whose *post-mortem* activity was feared. Although he acknowledges that, in some instances, the act of prone burial could imply religious piety (as in the case of Pepin the Short), he does not consider any of the Anglo-Saxon prone burials to belong to devout Christians or catechumens who had died before receiving baptism. The fact that many of the prone burials in Anglo-Saxon England were discovered at specifically designated execution sites, where other kinds of atypical burials had been performed, supports the idea that they were predominantly burials of wrong-doers.

5. CONCLUSIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH ON PRONE BURIALS IN EARLY MEDIEVAL POLAND

Having reviewed the custom of prone burial in various cultural milieus in early medieval Europe, we can now return to the evidence for this practice in Poland and propose some final conclusions.

In comparison with other atypical funerary practices conducted in early medieval Poland (e.g. stoned burials, decapitations etc.), it appears that prone burials form a relatively large and diverse group. A synthesis of all known examples demonstrates that prone burials share some similarities, especially with regard to their age and sex – most are adult men, with only a few examples of females. The geographical distribution of prone burials may also be revealing, since most of the graves of this type are concentrated in western and north-western Poland. Their high frequency in the heart of the Piast state might reflect the implementation of secular judicial organization. The tying of legs is a particularly strong indication that these prone burials could belong to criminals; and it is likely that the people interred this way had died by hanging and were thrown into the grave in careless and hasty funerals.

With the exception of the problematic grave from Gwiazdowo, most prone burials do not contain objects indicating a low social status of the deceased. However, we should also bear in mind that in early medieval Poland the practice of furnishing graves with objects was not as common as in Scandinavia or Anglo-Saxon England, and that the lack of grave goods need not necessarily indicate poverty of the deceased or of the mourners responsible for orchestrating the funeral. None of the prone burials contain objects of an amuletic character so, contrary to the evidence from Anglo-Saxon England, they cannot be justifiably interpreted as belonging to ritual specialists.

In the case of early medieval Poland, although it is difficult to reconstruct the identities of the dead buried in a prone position and unravel the exact reasons underlying this practice, it is possible to suggest several likely interpretations:

- Prone burials with tied limbs could indicate that the deceased were criminals and died as a result of hanging.
- Prone burials located at the boundaries of cemeteries could imply an intention to mark the dead as 'different'. They could be burials of criminals or perhaps of individuals who died before receiving baptism.
- Some prone burials may belong to people who committed suicide.
- The prone burial of the woman from Gwiazdowo, which contained rich grave goods, could possibly belong to a devout Christian, but given the poor quality of documentation, this interpretation is extremely tentative.
- There are strong reasons to believe that the woman from grave 110 at Stary Zamek was buried alive. In the context of later textual sources from this part of

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[56] Reynolds 2009, pp. 74–75.

[57] Reynolds 2009, p. 160.

[58] Reynolds 2009, pp. 160-161.

> Poland, it is possible that burying women this way was a punishment for the murder of children.

In light of the interpretations offered above, it seems that fear of revenants may not have been the guiding principle behind prone burials. Although nineteenth- and twentieth-century ethnographic descriptions speak of prone burial as a typical method of protecting the living against revenants, they are also fairly consistent in saying that this occurred *after* reopening the grave and not at the initial funeral. As I have shown, *none* of the prone burials from early medieval Poland display traces of disturbance or reopening and therefore cannot be easily interpreted along these lines. In the context of comparative evidence, especially from Anglo-Saxon England, it seems that most prone burials in early medieval Poland belonged to criminals, and that the act of burying them face down was intended to display contempt and disregard during the funeral. Although there are no medieval textual accounts that describe prone burial as a form of punishment in early medieval Poland, the fact that most such burials have been found in the heart of the Piast state makes the legal interpretation of these practices very likely.

Table 1. Prone burials from early medieval Poland

No.	Site	Grave number	Sex	Age	Orientation	Grave goods	References	Comments
1.	Adolfin, Kuyavian-Pomeranian Voivodeship	Unnumbered	F	?	E-W	None	Zielonka 1957, pp. 20–23; Kaszewska 1960, p. 147; Żydok 2004, p. 46; Wrzesiński 2008b, p. 152; Gardeła 2011a, pp. 39–41	-
2.	Cedynia (site 2), West Pomeranian Voivodeship	1039	?	?	E-W	None	Porzeziński 2008, pp. 17–18, 23, 36	-
3.	Cedynia (site 2a),West Pomeranian Voivodeship	76	?	Adult?	NE-SW	None	Żydok 2004, p. 46; Porzeziński 2006, p. 341; Gardeła 2012a, pp. 30–32	Decapitated, possibly with tied legs
4.	Cedynia (site 2a), West Pomeranian Voivodeship	183	?	?	SW-NE	None	Porzeziński 2006, p. 359; Gardeła 2012, pp. 30–32	-
5.	Ciepłe, Pomeranian Voivodeship	12/2005	M	Adult?	E-W?	None	Ratajczyk 2011, p. 557; Gardeła 2012a, pp. 33–34	The grave had remains of some wooden construction (coffin?) and the body may have been wrapped in a shroud, as suggested by the 'compressed' appearance of the skeletal remains
6.	Dziekanowice (site 22), Greater Poland Voivodeship	52/03	M	30–35	?	None	Buko 2011, p. 410, fig. 48	Shot with an arrow
7.	Giecz, Greater Poland Voivodeship	?	?	?	?	?	Indycka 2005, p. 179; Gardeła 2011a, pp. 39, 41	The grave has never been fully published and is only briefly mentioned in the preliminary cemetery report
8.	Gruczno (site 2), Kuyavian-Pomeranian Voivodeship	502	M	*Adultus*	E-W	-	Boguwolski 1969, pp. 3–7; Żydok 2004, p. 46; Falis 2013, pp. 61–62	-

No.	Site	Grave number	Sex	Age	Orientation	Grave goods	References	Comments
9.	Gwiazdowo, Greater Poland Voivodeship	2	F	'Young female'	N-S	Three temple rings made of lead, an iron knife in a scabbard with bronze fittings, an ornamented bronze ring, another ring (perhaps made of silver and with a diameter of 2.4cm)	Rajewski 1937, pp. 33, 54, 68–69; Kaszewska 1960, p. 147; Żydok 2004, pp. 46, 53; Wrzesiński 2008, p. 152; Gardeła 2011a, pp. 39, 41–42	-
10.	Kałdus (site 1), Kuyavian-Pomeranian Voivodeship	24/57	M	?	SW-NE	None	Kaszewska 1960, pp. 145–147, 156, 160; Żydok 2004, p. 47 (mistakingly labelled grave 42); Stawska 2006a, pp. 57–58; Wrzesiński 2008b, p. 153; Gardeła 2011a, pp. 39, 42–43; Matczak 2014, pp. 440, 451, 456	Probably decapitated, healed damage to the leg (broken and healed right leg)
11.	Kałdus (site 4), Kuyavian-Pomeranian Voivodeship	26/00	F	*Maturus*	E-W	Fragment of an iron knife	Bojarski 2003, p. 22; Bojarski, Chudziak, Drozd, Koperkiewicz, Kozłowski, Stawska 2010, pp. 444–445; Gardeła 2011a, pp. 39, 42–43; Matczak 2014, pp. 440, 457	-
12.	Kałdus (site 4), Kuyavian-Pomeranian Voivodeship	131/01	M	*Adultus*	NW-SE	None	Bojarski 2003, p. 22; Bojarski, Chudziak, Drozd, Koperkiewicz, Kozłowski, Stawska 2010, p. 479; Gardeła 2011a, pp. 39, 42–43; Matczak 2014, pp. 440, 457	-
13.	Kałdus (site 4), Kuyavian-Pomeranian Voivodeship	358/02	?	Adult?	SE-NW?	Fragment of a silver coin by the right leg	Bojarski, Chudziak, Drozd, Koperkiewicz, Kozłowski, Stawska 2010, p. 558; Gardeła 2011a, pp. 39, 42–43; Matczak 2014, pp. 440, 457	-
14.	Kałdus (site 4), Kuyavian-Pomeranian Voivodeship	383/03	M	*Maturus*	NE-SW	None	Bojarski 2003, p. 110; Bojarski, Chudziak, Drozd, Koperkiewicz, Kozłowski, Stawska 2010, p. 566; Matczak 2014, pp. 440, 457	-

No.	Site	Grave number	Sex	Age	Orientation	Grave goods	References	Comments
15.	Lubień, Łódź Voivodeship	49	M	*Adultus* (20–30)	E-W	Iron knife at the waist	Gardeła 2012a, pp. 34–35; Kurasiński, Skóra 2012, pp. 37–38, 180	On the margin of the cemetery
16.	Lubień, Łódź Voivodeship	92	M	*Adultus* (20–30)	E-W	None	Gardeła 2012a, pp. 34–35; Kurasiński, Skóra 2012, pp. 37–38, 193	On the margin of the cemetery. This individual had *cribra orbitalia* and *sutura metopica*
17.	Lubień, Łódź Voivodeship	110	M	*Maturus* (45–55)	E-W	Iron knife under the pelvis	Gardeła 2012a, pp. 34–35; Kurasiński, Skóra 2012, pp. 37–38, 200	Hole in the skull (ø 20–25mm), on the margin of the cemetery
18.	Niemcza, Lower Silesian Voivodeship	96	M	*Maturus* (40–50)	?	Iron nail at the knees	Bal, Fercowicz, Kaźmierczyk 1982, p. 73; Żydok 2004, p. 47; Gardeła 2012a, pp. 32–33; Stanaszek 2016b, pp. 16–17	Perhaps with tied legs
19.	Poznań-Śródka, Greater Poland Voivodeship	23	?	?	?	None	Pawlak 1995, p. 115; 1998, pp. 246, 251; Pawlak, Pawlak 2015, pp. 53–54	-
20.	Poznań-Śródka, Greater Poland Voivodeship	285	Probably M	*Iuvenis*	E-W	None	Pawlak, Pawlak 2015, p. 54	On the margin of the cemetery and in an area with a range of other atypical graves
21.	Poznań-Śródka, Greater Poland Voivodeship	292	Unknown	?	E-W	None	Pawlak, Pawlak 2015, p. 54	On the margin of the cemetery and in an area with a range of other atypical graves. Legs bent at the knees at right angles. The pit was much shorter than the height of the deceased
22.	Sandomierz, Świętokrzyskie Voivodeship	9	?	?	?	?	Gąssowski 1969, pp. 404–405; Stanaszek 1998, pp. 23–24; Gardeła 2011a, pp. 39, 43	A mass grave with two individuals buried in prone position

No.	Site	Grave number	Sex	Age	Orientation	Grave goods	References	Comments
23.	Sandomierz, Świętokrzyskie Voivodeship	90	M	*Maturus*	N-S	None	Stanaszek 1998, p. 24; Żydok 2004, pp. 48, 54; Gardeła 2011a, pp. 39, 43	On the margin of the cemetery
24.	Starczewice, Masovian Voivodeship	?	?	?	?	?	Miśkiewicz 2010, pp. 141–142	-
25.	Stary Zamek, Lower Silesian Voivodeship	110	F	*Maturus*	E-W	Traces of green patina by the skull, perhaps suggesting the presence of a temple ring (which may have decomposed completely)	Wachowski 1992, pp. 19, 90–91; Żydok 2004, pp. 48, 54; Gardeła 2011a, pp. 39, 43–44	Traces of three 'stakes' have been noted in the grave pit, located in equal distances, diagonally across the grave pit. Possible live burial?
26.	Świelubie, West Pomeranian Voivodeship	5	F	25–35	NE-SW	Two undetermined iron objects	Łosiński 1972, p. 270; Malinowska-Łazarczyk 1982(I), p. 109; Wrzesiński 2008b, p. 153; Gardeła 2011a, pp. 39, 44	-
27.	Wawrzeńczyce, Lesser Poland Voivodeship	157	?	*Infans* II (10–12)		None	Mazur, Mazur 2011, pp. 426–427	The individual was buried with legs bent at the knees and with the feet lying on the buttocks. This implies that the body may have been tied
28.	Wolin Młynówka, West Pomeranian Voivodeship	15(29)	M	*Adultus*	N-S	None	Wokroj 1967, p. 304; Wojtasik 1968, pp. 206–207; Żydok 2004, pp. 48, 50; Wrzesiński 2008b, p. 153; Gardeła 2011a, pp. 39, 45–46; Stanaszek 2016b, pp. 28–29	Decapitated, perhaps with tied legs
29.	Wolin Młynówka, West Pomeranian Voivodeship	31(96)	M	*Maturus*	E-W	A small ceramic shard	Wojtasik 1968; Żydok 2004, pp. 48, 50; Wrzesiński 2008b, p. 153; Gardeła 2011a, pp. 39, 45–46	-
30.	Wolin Młynówka, West Pomeranian Voivodeship	189(349)	M	*Adultus*	SE	None	Żydok 2004, p. 48	Perhaps with tied legs

CHAPTER 5
OFF WITH THEIR HEADS: DECAPITATION IN EARLY MEDIEVAL POLAND

1. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

The human head was of great importance to many Indo-European societies and its prominence in both secular and sacral contexts is clear from extant textual accounts and legends.[1] Tangible evidence concerning the removal, curation, display and role of the head in past societies has also survived in the archaeological record from prehistoric and medieval times.[2]

From as early as the Stone Age, the head was used to signal identity and status, but also to communicate profound metaphorical meanings, by adorning it with jewellery and by covering it with painted or tattooed ornaments. Red ochre – a natural earth pigment containing hydrated iron oxide – played a particularly prominent role in ritual practices associated with the head in prehistoric Europe. It was regarded as a remarkably powerful substance, and its ritual importance is attested in funerary contexts from the Czech Republic and France, where it has been found scattered over the remains of the dead, often around their heads or skulls. Based on archaeological evidence from various cultural milieus, it is possible to argue that among some societies, in the period spanning the Paleolithic through the Bronze Age, the red colour of ochre represented blood and the idea of rebirth.[3]

Among Celtic societies of the early Iron Age, the importance of the head developed even further. Human and animal heads were frequently portrayed in their art, especially in metalwork and stone sculpture.[4] The prominent role of this body-part in the Celtic worldview is also confirmed by intentional head or skull deposits, perhaps representing offerings or war trophies.[5] Although it would be a misinterpretation to claim that the Celts worshipped heads or that there existed some kind of 'Celtic head cult', it is nevertheless clear that the head motif was remarkably prominent in their culture and worldview.[6] When extant textual and archaeological sources are critically combined, it is even possible to argue that, for the Celts, the head may have been regarded as the residence or home of the soul and the essence of life. The cut-off head of an enemy, embalmed and safely stored (as in the famous account of Herodotus),[7] may have been more than just something to boast about to fellow warriors and companions. Rather than being merely a reminder of one's victory, perhaps the cut-off head was also believed to transmit some of the deceased person's energy and power into its owner.

The importance of heads or skulls in ritual contexts is also attested among other European societies of the Iron Age. Archaeological evidence shows that during this time heads were not only used as war trophies (as suggested by the vivid accounts of Herodotus and other classical chroniclers) but also as decorative motifs on objects made of metal, wood and clay.[8] The special role of the head in the Early Iron Age is also clear from funerary contexts. Among some Germanic societies of that time (for example the Goths at Masłomęcz in Poland), the heads of the dead were covered with pots or clay, and on some occasions intentionally removed, perhaps as part of secondary funerary rites in order to interact with the deceased or for other purposes which remain unknown to us today.[9]

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[1] See articles in Gardeła, Kajkowski 2013b; Kajkowski 2014b, p. 135.

[2] See, for example, Armit 2012 with further references.

[3] Woźny 2005; 2013.

[4] Armit 2012.

[5] For archaeological examples of head or skull deposits, see Armit 2012.

[6] Aldhouse-Green 1986; Armit 2012; Bartnik 2013; Bedyński 2013.

[7] See Ciesielski 2013, pp. 62–64 for discussion.

[8] See, for example, Bugaj 1999.

As we shall see further below, human and animal heads were also endowed with multiple meanings in Scandinavian societies of the Viking Age and played an important role in pre-Christian beliefs.[10] In Norse mythology, for example, the head of the primordial being, the hermaphrodite giant called Ymir, was cut off and the sky fashioned from its skull.[11] Interestingly, some of the Slavic gods, like Jaryło for example, were represented as carrying severed heads as their attributes[12] while other deities had multiple heads of their own, like the four-headed god Sventovit in the temple of Arkona in Rügen (see Chapter 1 and 2). There are also further examples of the special use of decapitated heads in Slavic folklore and folktales.[13]

When archaeological discoveries and textual sources are taken collectively, it is clear that human and animal heads were endowed with rich symbolic meanings in the world of the early medieval Western Slavs. In Jerzy Sikora's opinion, among these people, the head appears to have been the most important part of the body.[14] The great significance of the head for the early medieval Slavs is implied by the discoveries of so-called 'temple rings'.[15] Unlike Scandinavian women, who seem to have shown their status and wealth through the use of jewellery attached to the chest area (e.g. brooches, fibulas) or hung around the neck (e.g. necklaces, pendants, amulets etc.), it appears that the focus of Slavic females with regard to body decoration was predominantly the head. By adorning the head with jewellery or by wearing elaborate headdresses with temple rings attached, Slavic women could display their status and their distinct ethnic identity. However, the common practice of decorating the head may also have been understood on a more symbolic level and associated with archaic beliefs. In light of the comparative evidence reviewed briefly above, it is not unlikely that among the Slavs it was the head which was believed to house the human soul.

Although much can be said about the role of the head in Slavic societies,[16] our major focus in this chapter will be on the meanings attributed to the heads in executions and mortuary contexts. Therefore, particular attention will be paid to rather peculiar graves of individuals buried with severed heads, the majority of which have been previously classified as belonging to revenants or vampires. Through detailed analyses and by setting the archaeological material in an interdisciplinary and cross-cultural perspective, the aim here is to propose more nuanced interpretations of various ritual phenomena associated with the head, and especially with the practice of decapitation.

2. DECAPITATED BURIALS IN EARLY MEDIEVAL POLAND: SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES

Evidence for decapitation in early medieval Poland is known from over twenty graves that date between the late tenth and thirteenth centuries. However, the chronologically younger discoveries of beheaded skeletons at post-fourteenth-century execution sites show explicitly that this practice was continued in later periods as well.[17] While the motif of beheading in the early medieval period has never before been comprehensively studied,[18] the practice of decapitation in the Late Middle Ages and early modern period in Poland has been extensively explored in the works of Daniel Wojtucki[19] and Paweł Duma.[20] Late Medieval material falls beyond of the scope of this book and will be only briefly discussed here.

The majority of early medieval decapitation burials dating between the late tenth and thirteenth centuries are known from Western Pomerania, with isolated examples in Kuyavia, Greater Poland, Silesia and elsewhere in Poland (**Fig. 5.1**). Before we proceed with an analysis of their different variants and characteristics,

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[9] Kokowski 1995; Ciesielski 2013.

[10] Ström 1942, pp. 162–178; Gardeła 2013b; Neiß 2013.

[11] Simek 2006, pp. 377–378.

[12] Wenska 2013.

[13] For example, the tale of Wasylisa in Dolińska 1990, pp. 27–38; see also Wenska 2013.

[14] Sikora 2013d.

[15] As mentioned in Chapter 1, a temple ring is a type of head adornment usually made of copper alloy or silver and intended to be sewn onto a textile or leather band and worn at the temples.

[16] See previous studies on the role of the head among the Slavs by Kajkowski 2013; 2014b.

[17] See, for example, Wojtucki 2009; 2014; Duma 2010; 2015; Obtułowicz, Pokutta 2014.

[18] Although see some preliminary analyses by Felis 2007 and Kajkowski 2013; 2014b the latter of which focus mainly on Pomerania.

[19] Wojtucki 2009; 2014.

[20] Duma 2010; 2015.

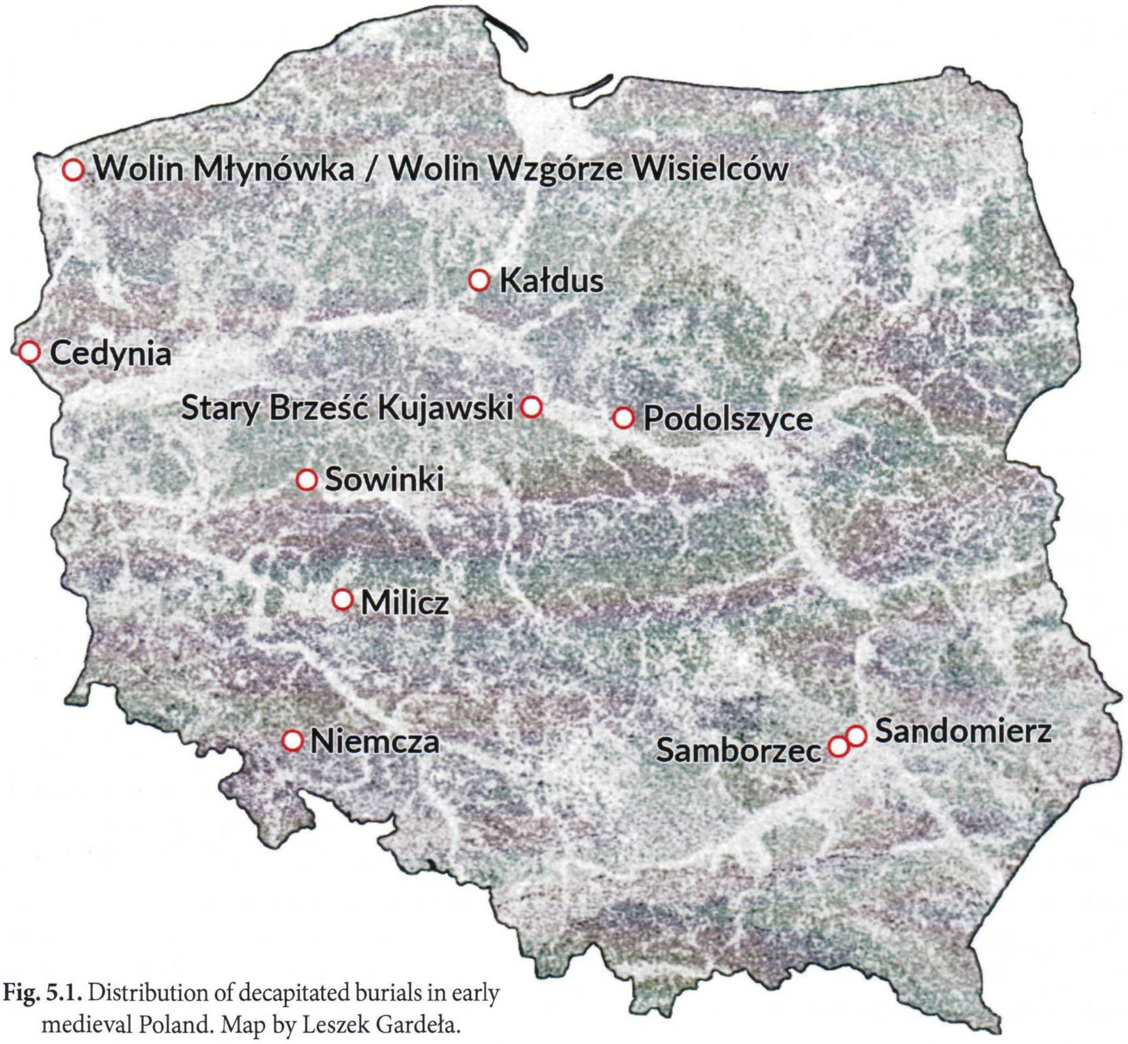

Fig. 5.1. Distribution of decapitated burials in early medieval Poland. Map by Leszek Gardeła.

however, it is essential to highlight some of the major methodological problems that significantly hamper current research – namely, the fact that most of the graves that form the basis of the present study were discovered in the 1960s and 1970s (as part of the aforementioned Millennial Project), and that the quality of their field documentation and of the ensuing publications is often rudimentary by today's standards. It is possible, therefore, that what is often regarded as evidence for decapitation in earlier works,[21] in the case of some graves may not, in fact, have been intentional, but may instead have resulted from taphonomic processes or other post-depositional factors.

How, then, can we identify indisputable examples of decapitations in the archaeological record? Cases when the head is detached from the spine and lies at a considerable distance from it in the grave (for example on the chest or somewhere in the leg area) provide very strong evidence that an act of beheading was performed. However, we should be aware that displacement of the skull may also result from various taphonomic and post-depositional processes, such as the intrusion of animals or unintentional grave disturbance caused by modern agriculture. We should also remember that displacement of the skull is very likely to occur in the case of coffin burials or chamber graves, where the empty space allows for the head to roll as the body and other organic materials gradually decompose. In general, most scholars would agree that cut marks on the spine or skull are the clearest and most evident traces of beheading,[22] but, unfortunately, the majority of skeletons from alleged decapitation graves in Poland have not been subjected to detailed osteological analyses which could potentially identify such traces.

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[21] For example those by Żydok 2004 and Porzeziński 2008.

[22] See discussion in Reynolds 2009, pp. 76–78, 166–169. See also Obtułowicz, Pokutta 2014.

Bearing in mind all of the methodological problems outlined above, the following analysis focuses on examples of burials which – in the opinion of the author – are *likely* to represent instances of *pre-* or *post-mortem* decapitation. It must be emphasised, however, that since, in the course of preparing this monograph, it has been impossible to conduct new anthropological analyses of the skeletal material, some of the hypotheses offered below might require revision in the future.

National patterning of decapitated burials

As mentioned above, cemeteries with decapitated burials are distributed in different parts of early medieval Poland. Statistically speaking, most examples are from Western Pomerania and Kuyavia. This evidence could potentially suggest a higher frequency of beheading in these two areas, although it may also be a reflection of more extensive and systematic excavation works in these parts of the country.

The cemetery at Cedynia in Western Pomerania is the site with the largest number of graves of allegedly decapitated individuals. In many of the graves in which the heads/skulls were missing, the act of beheading seems to have coincided with the intriguing practice of substituting the heads with stones (see Chapter 6 for further details regarding graves with stones). However, Helena Malinowska-Łazarczyk, the author of the major monograph of the excavations at site 2 at Cedynia, advises caution in interpreting the graves with (allegedly) missing heads as those of beheaded individuals. She observes that many of them were disturbed in modern times (due to agricultural activity and construction work, for example) and argues that these intentional or accidental intrusions may have led to the disarticulation of the skeletal remains. As she comments in her study:

> Ze względu na dużą ilość zniszczonych grobów nie rozpatruję pochówków bez czaszek ani też samych czaszek. Trudno je traktować jako wynik działalności pozostałych przy życiu członków społeczności. Ponieważ ilość luźnych znalezisk tego typu na cmentarzysku w Cedyni była znaczna, okazałoby się, że około 50% zmarłym składano w ofierze głowy innych osób.[23]

> Due to a large number of disturbed graves, burials that lack skulls or burials of skulls alone are excluded from my analyses. It is difficult to regard them as the result of the intentional action of the living community. Because the number of finds of this type in the cemetery at Cedynia was very high, it would mean that over 50% of the deceased were buried with head sacrifices [which, in her view, is highly unlikely – LG].

Malinowska-Łazarczyk's approach to the graves of seemingly 'headless' individuals, or to the discovery of single (or multiple) skulls in graves at Cedynia, was very careful and skeptical. However, in a paper on anti-vampire burials published in 2008, Antoni Porzeziński isolated a number of cases which, in his opinion, suggested an act of decapitation with apotropaic intent.[24] Among them he includes cases in which:

- The head is detached from the postcranial skeleton and laid face down.
- The head is decapitated and missing from the grave.
- The head is decapitated and substituted with a stone.
- The head is decapitated and placed at the feet. Additionally, in graves of this type, a stone substitutes for the head.

Porzeziński's article on the so-called anti-vampire burials from Cedynia is highly controversial and problematic. A careful analysis of his source material reveals that many of his ideas are based on conjecture rather than solid argumentation. Moreover, in his interpretations, he often leans too heavily and uncritically on earlier studies of so-called anti-vampire burials from Poland which, as I have shown in Chapter 3, raise a lot of objections.

Generally speaking, based on the documentation from Cedynia which I have obtained and reevaluated during my archival research at the Muzeum Regionalne w Cedyni (Eng. Regional Museum at Cedynia) in 2015, it is extremely difficult to verify with certainty which of the graves from sites 2 and 2a really represent cases of intentional decapitation. The entries in Malinowska-Łazarczyk's original field diary are very laconic and usually provide only basic details about the alignment of skeletons and the grave goods that occasionally accompanied them (**Fig. 5.2** and **Fig. 5.3**). Moreover, the plans from the excavation do not include drawings of grave sections, so in the case of graves where stones substitute for the missing heads it is difficult to verify if the stones actually lay on the floor of the pit (i.e. at the same level as the body) or whether they were stratigraphically higher (on or above the body in the fill). Most strikingly, however, some photographs of the graves do not resemble their field drawings. It seems that this was not the result of the photographs being taken

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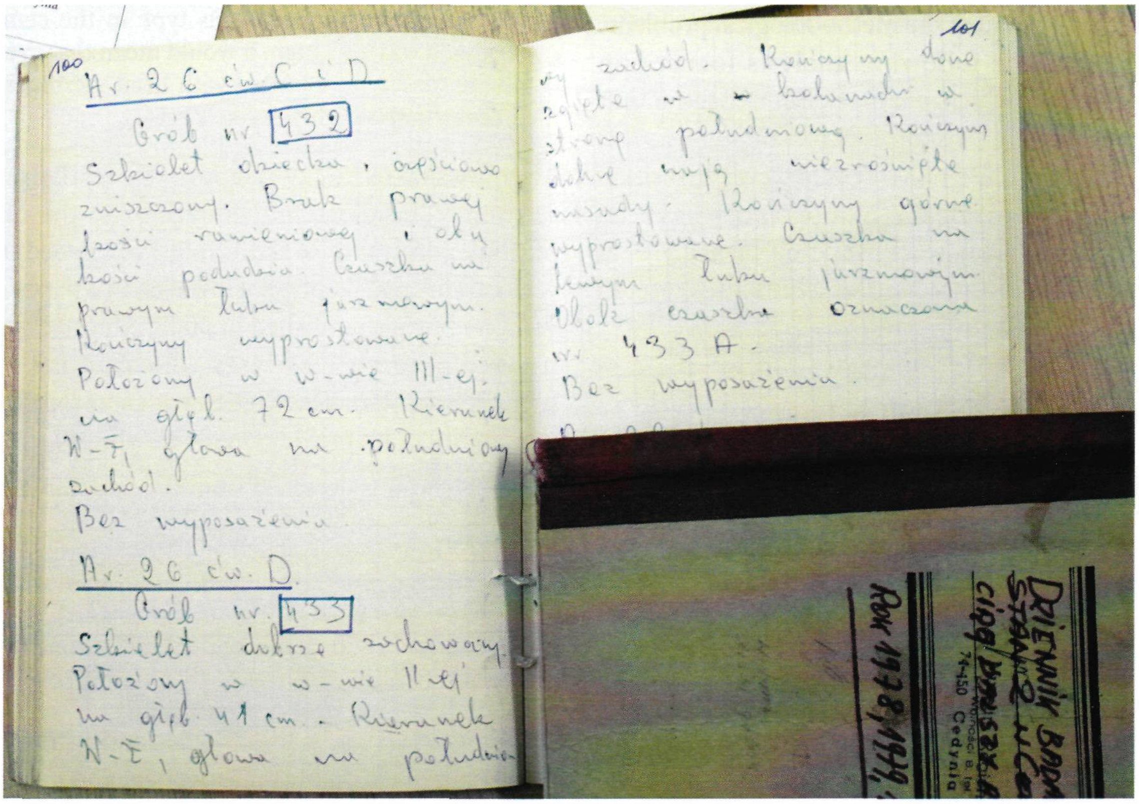
[23] Malinowska-Łazarczyk 1982(I), p. 26.

[24] Porzeziński 2008, p. 14.



100

Ar. 26 ćw. C i D

Grób nr 432

Szkielet dziecka, częściowo zniszczony. Brak prawej kości ramieniowej i obu kości podudzia. Czaszka na prawym łuku jarzmowym. Kończyny wyprostowane. Położony w w-wie III-ej. na głęb. 72 cm. Kierunek W-E, głowa na południowy zachód.

Bez wyposażenia.

Ar. 26 ćw. D.

Grób nr. 433

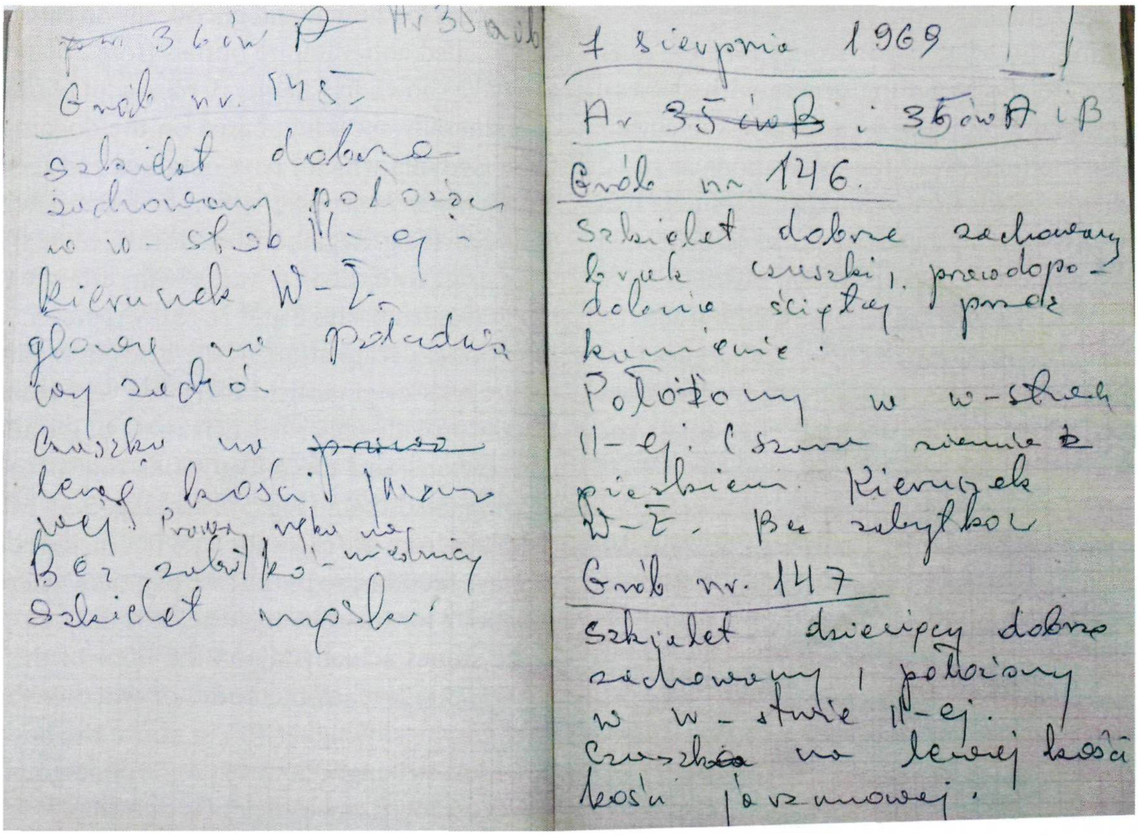
Szkielet dobrze zachowany. Położony w w-wie II-ej na głęb. 41 cm. Kierunek W-E, głowa na południowy zachód. Kończyny dolne zgięte w kolanach w stronę południową. Kończyny dolne mają niezrośnięte nasady. Kończyny górne wyprostowane. Czaszka na lewym łuku jarzmowym. Obok czaszka oznaczona nr. 433 A.

Bez wyposażenia.

101

DZIENNIK BADA
CIĄG
74-150 Cedynia
Rok 1978, 1979,

Fig. 5.2. Field diaries from the excavations at Cedynia. Collections of Muzeum Regionalne w Cedyni. Photo by Leszek Gardeła.



~~Ar. 36 ćw A~~ Ar 35 a i b

Grób nr. 145

Szkielet dobrze zachowany położony w w-stwie III-ej. Kierunek W-E, głowa na południowy zachód.

Czaszka na ~~prawej~~ lewej kości jarzmowej. Prawa ręka na miednicy. Bez zabytków. Szkielet mały.

1 sierpnia 1969

Ar. ~~35 ćw B~~ i 36 ćw A i B

Grób nr 146.

Szkielet dobrze zachowany. Brak czaszki, prawdopodobnie ściętej przed kumienie.

Położony w w-stwie II-ej. (szara ziemia z piaskiem. Kierunek W-E. Bez zabytków

Grób nr. 147

Szkielet dziecięcy dobrze zachowany i położony w w-stwie II-ej. Czaszka na lewej kości kości jarzmowej.

Fig. 5.3. Original description of grave 146 in the field diary from the excavations at Cedynia. Collections of Muzeum Regionalne w Cedyni. Photo by Leszek Gardeła.

at different stages of excavation, but rather represents hasty or simply sloppy documentation. All these source-critical problems have never before been made explicit in archaeological publications (especially in those concerning the so-called anti-vampire practices), but it is essential to be aware of them in any future attempt to interpret the funerary evidence from Cedynia.

In his article from 2008, Porzeziński classified eleven graves from site 2 (nos. 60, 146, 186, 196, 215, 530, 552, 789, 841, 888, 910) and one grave from site 2a (no. 76) from Cedynia as belonging to decapitated individuals. However, bearing in mind all of the source-critical problems mentioned above, some of his interpretations may raise objections. To better illustrate the problem, we must examine these alleged decapitation burials more closely:

- **Grave 60** (site 2) belonged to an individual buried in a supine position (**Fig. 5.4**).[25] According to Malinowska-Łazarczyk and Antoni Porzeziński, the head was missing from the grave and three stones lay in its place. Moreover, a ring with an inscription was found on one of the fingers of the right hand (see below for discussion). Jewellery in decapitation graves occurs very rarely. The presence of a ring might suggest that this grave was wrongly interpreted as belonging to a decapitated individual and that the stones may originally have been laid over the head, which after a while decomposed completely.
- The individual from **grave 76** at site 2a in Cedynia was buried in a prone position (face down) and his head was found detached from the spine.[26] As I have mentioned in Chapter 4, it is possible that his limbs were tied as well. Given the peculiar treatment of the body, it is likely that this individual was actually decapitated.
- **Grave 146** is one of the most peculiar alleged decapitation burials discovered at Cedynia (site 2). It has been discussed in several of my earlier publications, where I have highlighted some of the source-critical problems connected with the finds from this site.[27] Based on the field documentation, it appears that the man from grave 146 was buried in a supine position; there were three stones in place of his head, which lay decapitated at his feet. However, when the field drawing is compared with the photograph taken during the excavation, a number of striking discrepancies are immediately clear; most importantly, in the photograph the stones at the head appear to be placed in a different manner than shown in the drawing and the skull is much farther away from the feet (**Fig. 5.5**). Given the clustered concentration of burials in the cemetery at Cedynia, it may be that the skull at the feet, which has been attributed to the individual from grave 146 by the excavators, actually belongs to another grave nearby. Because the documentation is so problematic, this issue will probably remain unresolved unless specialist aDNA analyses are conducted. In light of this, the highly speculative artistic reconstruction of this grave previously published in several articles[28] must be approached with great caution (**Fig. 5.6**).
- A very strong case for decapitation can be made for **grave 186** (site 2) (**Fig. 5.7** and **Fig. 5.8**). Malinowska-Łazarczyk observes that the head/skull of this individual was rotated to lie face down, and that the deceased was additionally covered with large stones.[29] This combination of two 'deviant' features does indeed imply that they were intentional; it is highly unlikely that the presence of the stones on the skeleton and the turning of the head/skull resulted from accidental post-depositional factors (e.g. ploughing or other intrusive human or animal activity).
- In **grave 196** (site 2) the skull was missing and replaced with a stone (**Fig. 5.9** and **Fig. 5.10**).[30] What is remarkable, however, is that next to the stone lay a human mandible, probably belonging to the individual buried in this grave. We know from comparative evidence that during the act of decapitation, the blow could sometimes sever the mandible instead of passing smoothly through the spine.[31] For this reason, grave 196 may indeed be that of a beheaded individual.
- In Malinowska-Łazarczyk's description of **grave 215** (site 2), the skull is recorded as missing. She notes that a stone was found in its place (**Fig. 5.11** and **Fig. 5.12**).[32] Interestingly, she observes that beneath the stone lay a single temple ring made of bronze. In my view, the presence of this piece of jewellery might indicate that there was originally a skull in the grave, but after a while it either decomposed completely or was crushed after being covered with the large stone.
- **Grave 530** (site 2) displays another example of the substitution of a stone for a missing head (**Fig. 5.13**).[33] The deceased individual was buried in a supine

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[25] Malinowska-Łazarczyk 1982(II), p. 19; Porzeziński 2008, pp. 16, 23, 27.

[26] Żydok 2004, p. 46; Porzeziński 2006, p. 341; Gardeła 2012a, pp. 30–32.

[27] Gardeła 2011b; 2015a, pp. 119–121; see also Kajkowski 2013, pp. 167–168.

[28] See, for example, Kajkowski 2013, p. 168; Gardeła 2015a, p. 118.

[29] Malinowska-Łazarczyk 1982(II), p. 47; Porzeziński 2008, pp. 16, 23, 29.

[30] Malinowska-Łazarczyk 1982(II), p. 49; Porzeziński 2008, pp. 23, 30; Gardeła 2011b, p. 176.

[31] See, for example, Reynolds 2009, p. 169.

[32] Malinowska-Łazarczyk 1982(II), p. 54; Porzeziński 2008, pp. 17, 23, 30; Gardeła 2011b, p. 176.

[33] Malinowska-Łazarczyk 1982(II), p. 123.

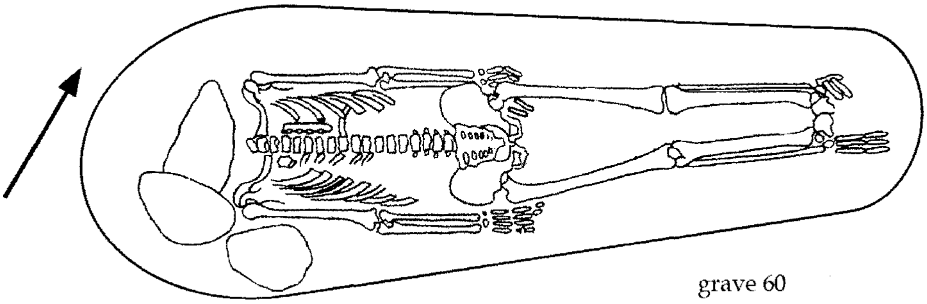

Fig. 5.4. Grave 60 from Cedynia. Reproduced after Porzeziński 2008, p. 27.

position, arms bent at the elbows. The left arm was on the chest and the right on the pelvis.

- The individual from **grave 552** (site 2) was interred in a wooden coffin, the traces of which survived as dark stains in the soil (**Fig. 5.14**).[34] A stone was found in place of the missing head, but it is unclear whether it had been originally deposited in the coffin or laid on its lid. At the waist lay an elaborately decorated leather belt with a bronze buckle and as many as fifteen fittings made of bronze foil. The rich furnishings of this grave make it unclear whether it actually belonged to a decapitated individual - lack of the head may merely result from poor preservation or disturbance in modern times.
- In **grave 789** (site 2), the dislocated skull was likely removed during intentional grave disturbance in the early medieval period - this unique case will be discussed separately in Chapter 7.[35]
- The adult man from **grave 841** (site 2) had his head separated from his neck and his arms crossed at the pelvis which, in Porzeziński's view, implies that they may have been tied (**Fig. 5.15** and **Fig. 5.16**).[36] Furthermore, the compressed arrangement of the lower extremities suggests that the man could have had his legs bound or, alternatively, that the body was interred in a shroud. Altogether, these practices suggest that this individual may indeed have been decapitated.
- **Graves 888**[37] and **910**[38] (both at site 2) belonged to male individuals whose heads were replaced with stones (**Fig. 5.17** and **Fig. 5.18**). According to the anthropological analysis, the man from grave 888 was 60 years old at the time of his death, while the man from grave 910 was 20–25 years old.

In conclusion, when the archival documentation and published works on the Cedynia graves are collectively and critically appraised, it seems possible to argue that some of them may have indeed belonged to decapitated individuals. Beheading is especially clear in the case of graves 76, 186, 196 and 841, and perhaps also in graves 215, 552, 789, 888 and 910. However, who exactly these headless people were and why they were treated in this way is another question, to which we will return towards the end of this chapter.

Apart from the examples from Cedynia, two graves from Kałdus (sites 1 and 4) also show evidence of decapitation. In Chapter 4 I have already discussed grave 24/57 (site 1), which contains a man buried in a prone position with his head cut off.[39] According to Violetta Stawska, the skull of this individual lay 14cm away from the last cervical vertebrae.[40] Moreover, the man's right leg had a healed fracture. Unsurprisingly, and in line with traditional approaches to atypical burials in Poland, Stawska interprets it as that of a 'vampire'.[41] Another intriguing case of decapitation at Kałdus (site 4) is grave 256/01 (**Fig. 5.19**).[42] It represents a double burial of a male and a female with the two individuals facing each other. The mature woman was laid on her left side with her arms bent and her left hand on her chin. The man, also of mature age, was buried on his right side with his left hand on his pelvis. Anthropological analyses have revealed cut marks on the vertebrae of the woman and damage to her clavicle and mandible. All of this evidence, coupled with the unusual position of the woman's skull (pulled backwards at a strong angle), indicates that she was decapitated. What is more, the skeletal remains of the man suggest that he was beheaded as well - there are cut marks on his vertebrae and some damage to the mandible.[43]

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[34] Malinowska-Łazarczyk 1982(II), p. 130; Porzeziński 2008, pp. 23, 32; Gardeła 2011b, p. 177.

[35] See also Gardeła in press a.

[36] Porzeziński 2008, pp. 17, 35.

[37] Porzeziński 2008, pp. 23, 35; Gardeła 2011b, p. 177.

[38] Porzeziński 2008, pp. 17, 23.

[39] Kaszewska 1960; Stawska 2006a, p. 57; 2006b, p. 329; Kajkowski 2013, pp. 165–166.

[40] Stawska 2006a, p. 57; 2006b, p. 329.

[41] Stawska 2006a, p. 58.

[42] Bojarski, Chudziak, Drozd, Koperkiewicz, Kozłowski, Stawska 2010, pp. 523–524; Kozłowski 2010, p. 53; Stawska, Bojarski, Chudziak 2010b, pp. 76–77; Kajkowski 2013, p. 166.

[43] Kozłowski 2008, pp. 105–106.

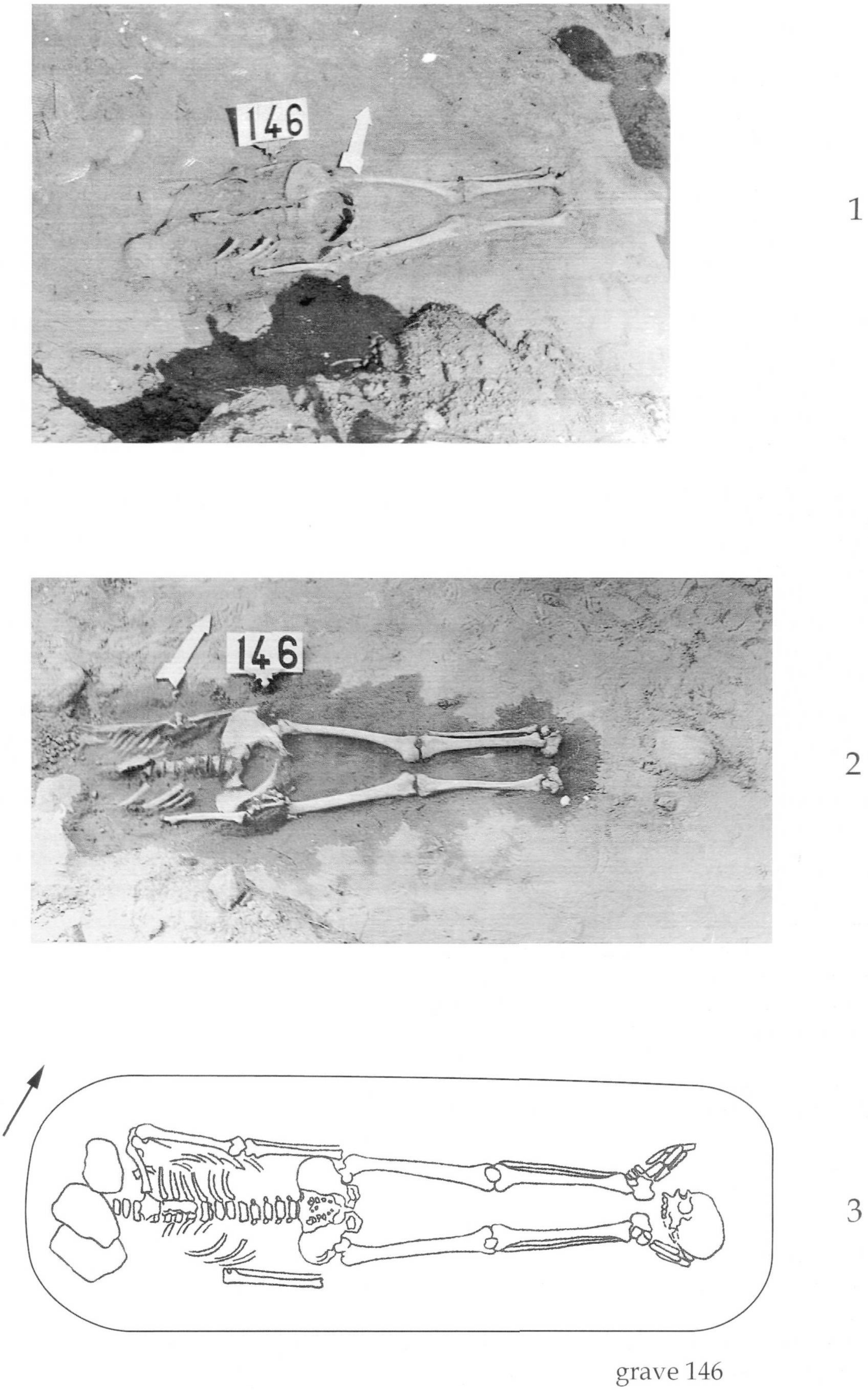
146
1
146
2
3
grave 146

Fig. 5.5. 1–2 – Photos of grave 146 from Cedynia. Collections of Muzeum Regionalne w Cedyni. 3 – Plan of grave 146 from Cedynia. Reproduced after Porzeziński 2008, p. 28.

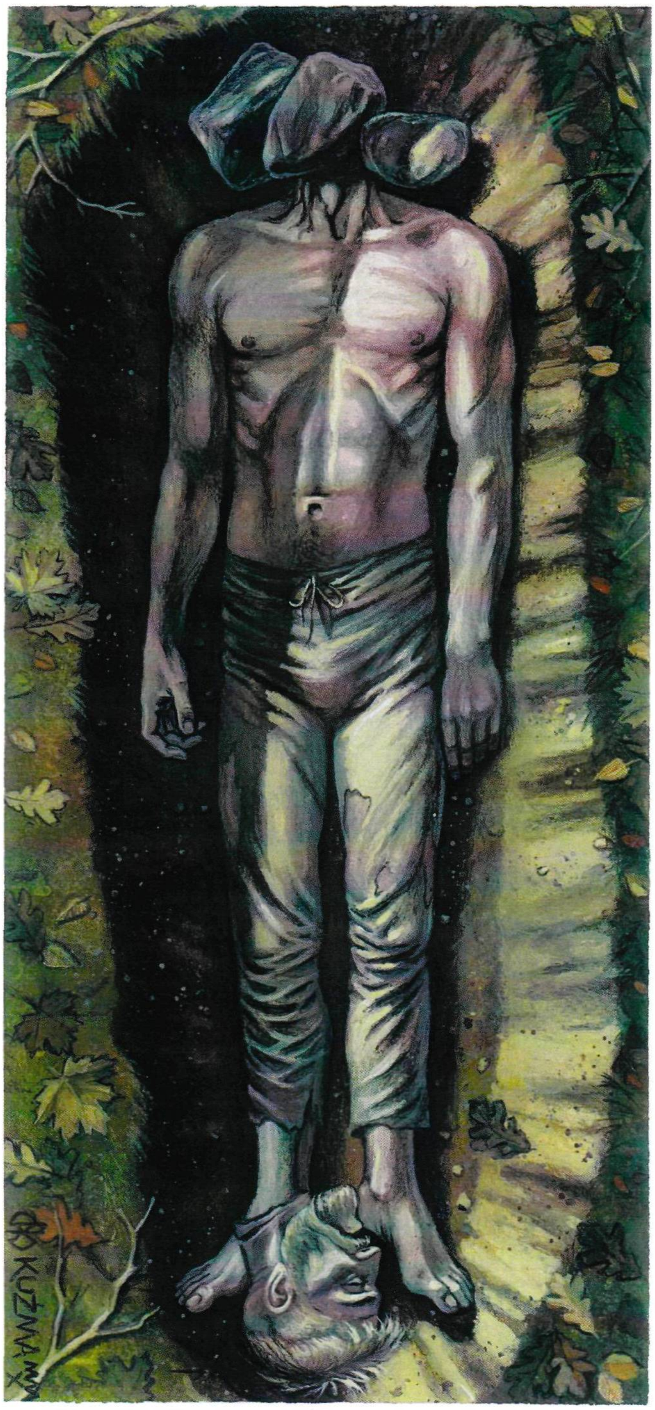

Fig. 5.6. Reconstruction of grave 146 from Cedynia. Illustration by Mirosław Kuźma. Copyright by Leszek Gardeła and Mirosław Kuźma.

Grave 446 from Stary Brześć Kujawski is another well-known example of a decapitation burial from Kuyavia (**Fig. 5.20**).[44] The deceased man, roughly 25 years old at the time of his death, was buried in a supine position and his severed head was placed between his feet. Anthropological analyses unequivocally confirm that an act of beheading was performed because there are clear cut marks on the mandible and on one of the vertebrae. This grave is interpreted by Zdzisław Kapica[45] as that of an 'upiór' (revenant) or a convict, whereas Maurycy Stanaszek[46] sees it as that of a 'vampire'.

In grave 229 from Milicz in Silesia, an adult man was buried in a supine position with his right arm on his chest.[47] His skull was dislocated and lay between his left arm and spine (although originally it was probably laid on the chest). Interestingly, the skull was positioned face down. Another grave from this site (grave 326) also belonged to a decapitated adult man.[48] His right arm was bent at the elbow and placed on his pelvis. One unique aspect of this case is that anthropological analyses have revealed a cut mark on the skull (interpreted as a missed blow), and have also shown that the skull was cut off by a blow that passed through the first two cervical vertebrae. Interestingly, traces of a fireplace were found above the skeleton.[49]

Also, two graves from Niemcza in Silesia could possibly belong to beheaded individuals.[50] Grave 62 belonged to a juvenile man and in grave 66 a mature man was buried. In the latter case, the skull appears to have been laid face down. It is noteworthy in this context that several skeletons found at Niemcza had traces of cut marks to the skull, probably inflicted with an axe, while other buried individuals were lacking their hands or feet.[51] These cases were interpreted by their excavators as graves of people who had died during the siege of the stronghold at Niemcza, although it is equally possible that they are actually graves of convicts.

In grave 30/84 from Płock-Podolszyce in Masovia, the skull was laid between the thighs of an individual of undetermined sex. Because of the peculiar position of the skull, Kordala and Falis have interpreted this grave as belonging to a 'vampire'.[52] It is not clear at which point the head/skull was detached from the spine, whether before or after burial. In an earlier study I have speculated about the possibility of this grave having

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[44] Kapica 1968; Stanaszek 2016b, pp. 23–26.

[45] Kapica 1968.

[46] Stanaszek 2016b, p. 25.

[47] Wachowski 1967, p. 141; Falis 2013, pp. 70–71.

[48] Wachowski 1967, p. 165.

[49] Wachowski 1967, p. 165.

[50] Kaźmierczyk, Wachowski 1976; Bal, Fercowicz, Kaźmierczyk 1982, p. 73; Falis 2013, pp. 73–74. For anthropological analyses of some of the skeletons from Niemcza, see Malinowski 1982.

[51] Bal, Fercowicz, Kaźmierczyk 1982, p. 73.

[52] Kordala 1992, p. 47; Falis 2013, pp. 75–76. See also Łuczak, Kordala 1995, pp. 5, 11.

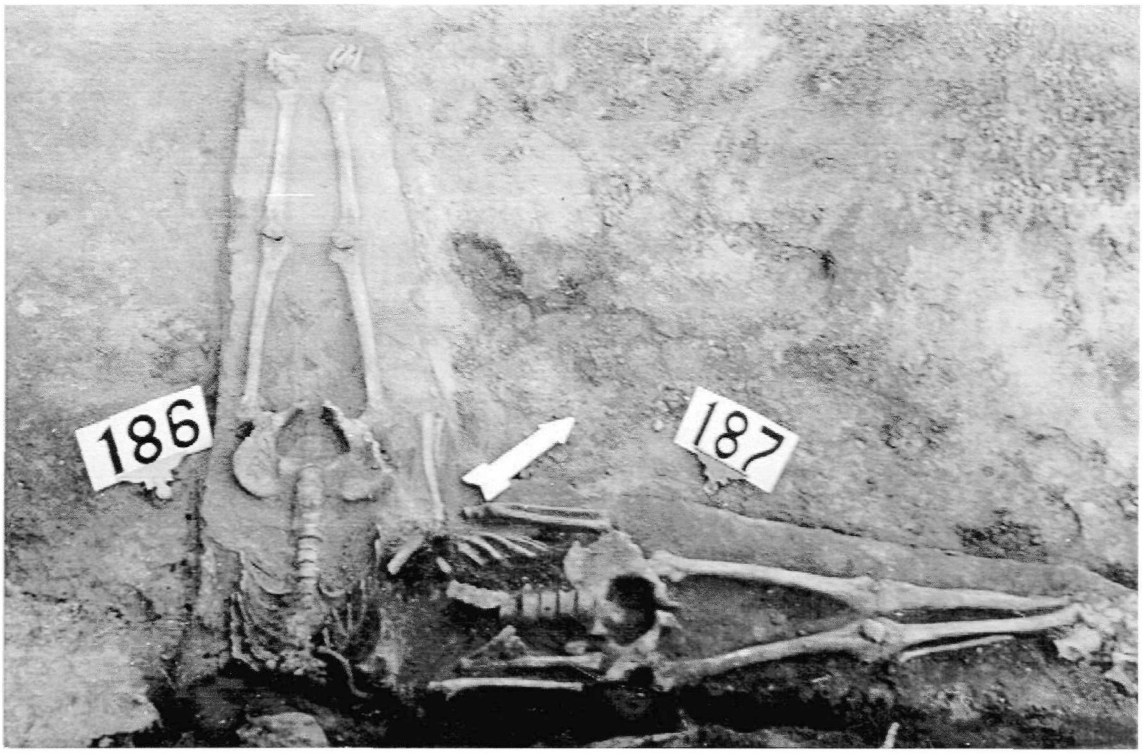

Fig. 5.7. Photo of grave 186 from Cedynia. Collections of Muzeum Regionalne w Cedyni. Used by kind permission.

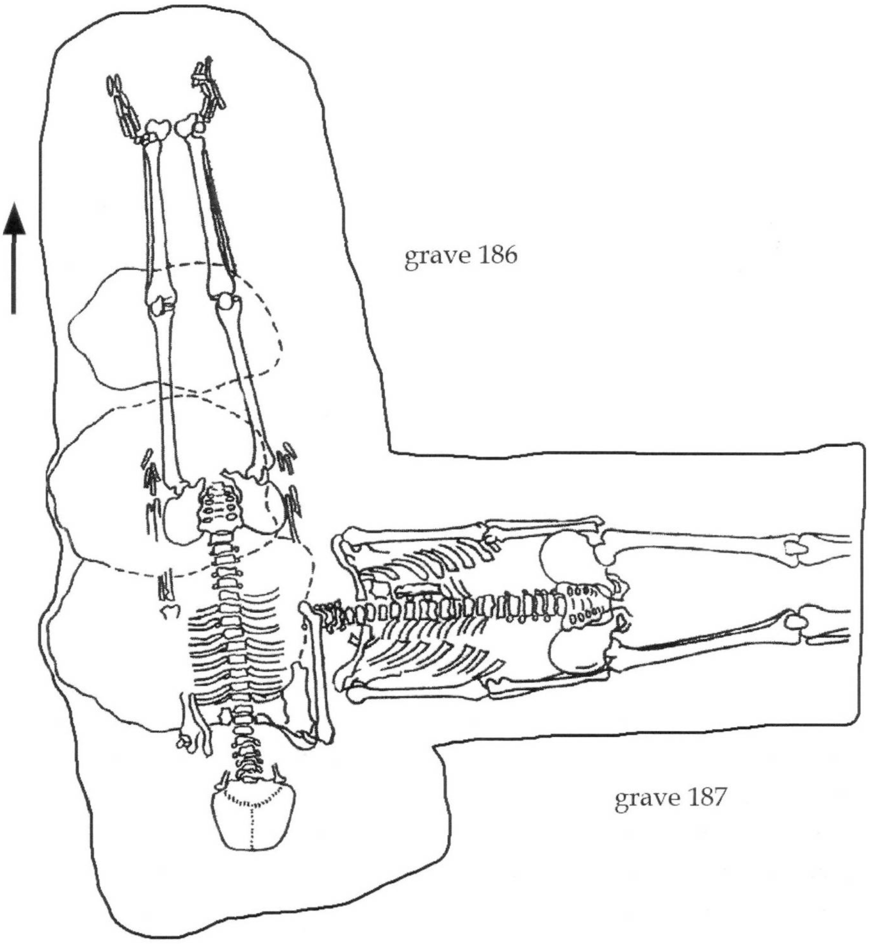
grave 186
grave 187

Fig. 5.8. Plan of grave 186 from Cedynia. Reproduced after Porzeziński 2008, p. 29.

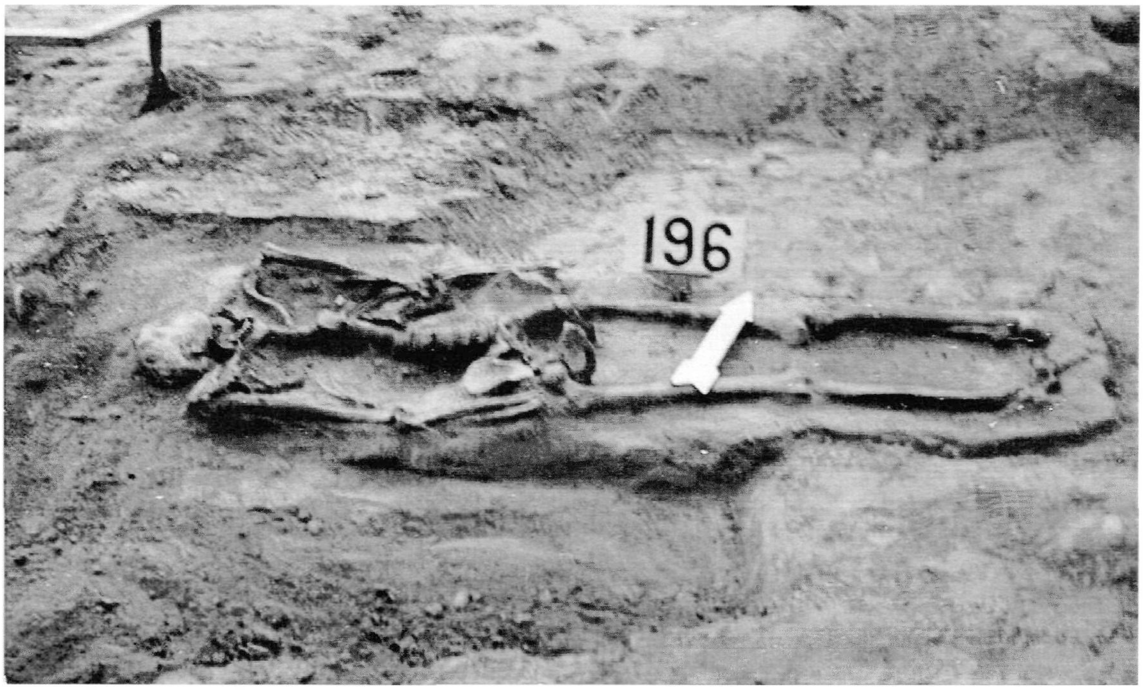

Fig. 5.9. Photo of grave 196 from Cedynia. Collections of Muzeum Regionalne w Cedyni. Used by kind permission.

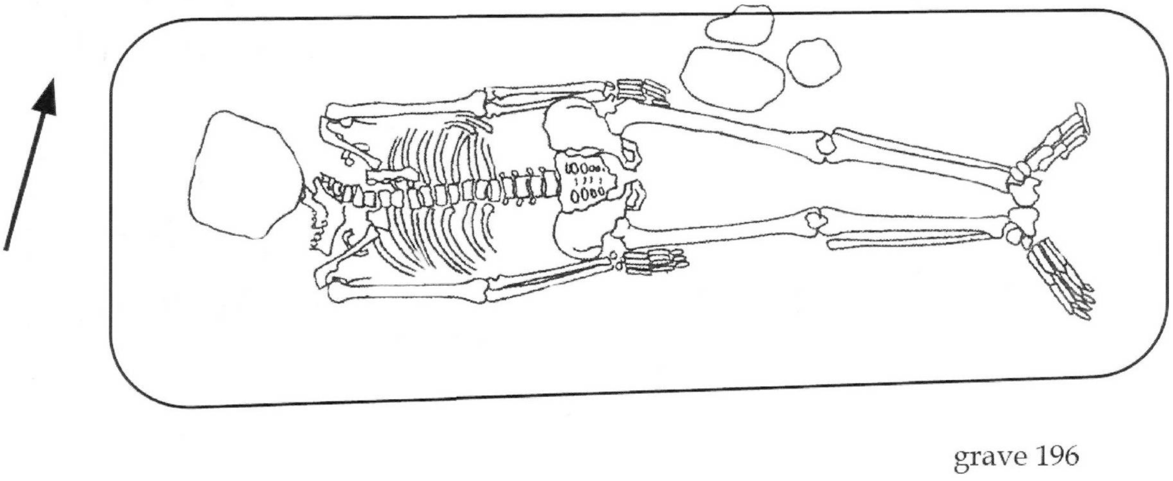

Fig. 5.10. Plan of grave 196 from Cedynia. Reproduced after Porzeziński 2008, p. 30.

been reopened, but admittedly no traces of disturbance were recorded upon excavation.[53]

Also, one problematic grave from Samborzec in Lesser Poland has been interpreted by Falis as that of a headless individual.[54] It contained the remains of an adult (*adultus/maturus*) buried with an iron knife on the chest. Falis has argued that the knife was stuck in the body, and that the peripheral location of the grave supports its interpretation as that of a revenant or vampire. However, the discovery of a temple ring in the head area might contradict this opinion and instead imply that the head decomposed after burial. The placement of the knife on the chest is also nothing unusual in early medieval funerary archaeology in Poland. In fact, knives are often buried on the chests of the deceased – the observation that they tend to subside between the ribs after decomposition of the soft tissues is often wrongly regarded as evidence for stabbing.[55]

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[53] Gardeła, Kajkowski, Szczepanik 2015, pp. 228–229.

[54] Falis 2013, p. 78.

[55] See valuable discussion in Wrzesiński 2000c; 2000d; 2008b.

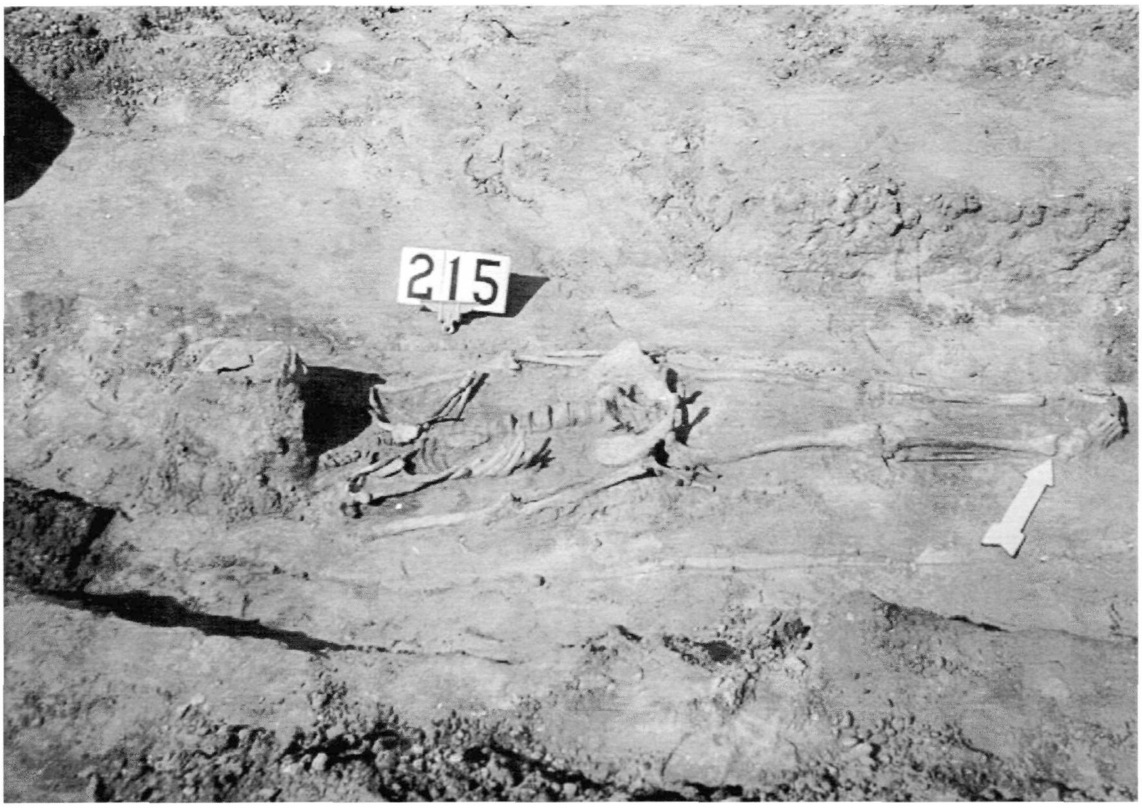

Fig. 5.11. Photo of grave 215 from Cedynia. Collections of Muzeum Regionalne w Cedyni. Used by kind permission.

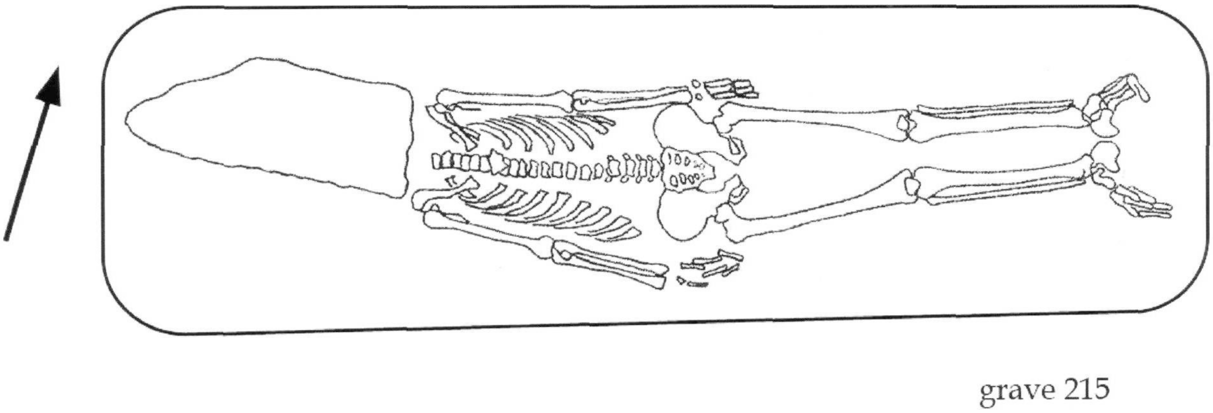

Fig. 5.12. Plan of grave 215 from Cedynia. Reproduced after Porzeziński 2008, p. 30.

Presumably, three graves from Sandomierz in Lesser Poland also belonged to decapitated individuals (10, 26, 101). Grave 10 has been described as 'damaged' (disturbed), and contained a headless individual of undetermined sex orientated E-W.[56] The skeletal remains lacked a right thighbone and the bones of the hands were missing as well. An iron knife was found between the ribs, but because of poor field documentation, it is impossible to ascertain whether it was stuck in the chest or simply laid over it. Gąssowski interpreted this grave as belonging to a person who had died in 'tragic circumstances', but refrained from discussing his hypothesis any further.[57] In grave 26, also from Sandomierz, a man was buried in a supine position and orientated E-W (**Fig. 5.21**). Upon excavation, his bones were preserved in an excellent condition but the skull was missing from the grave. Gąssowski speculated that the man had been decapitated prior

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[56] Stanaszek 1998, pp. 24–25.

[57] Gąssowski 1969, p. 405.

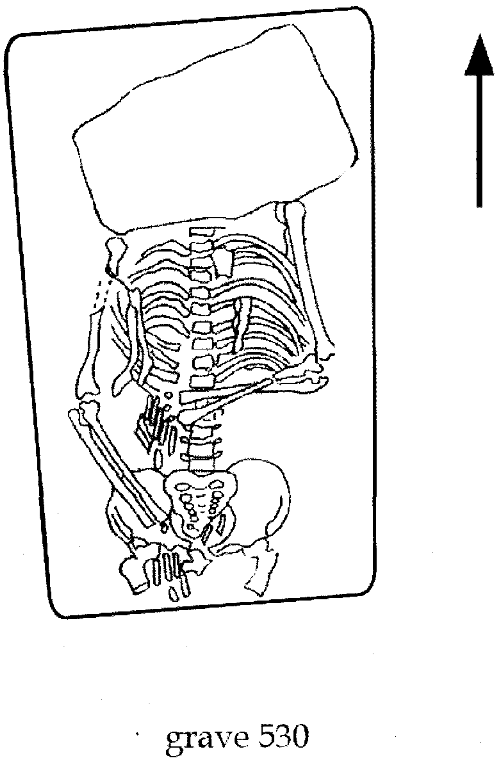

Fig. 5.13. Plan of grave 530 from Cedynia. Reproduced after Porzeziński 2008, p. 31.

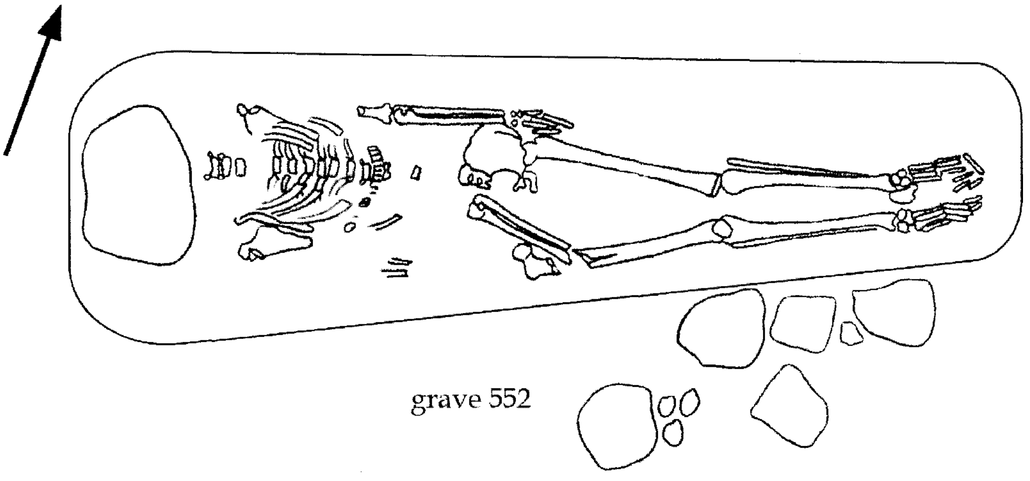

Fig. 5.14. Plan of grave 522 from Cedynia. Reproduced after Porzeziński 2008, p. 32.

to burial.[58] It is also noteworthy that an arrowhead was found stuck in the man's spine (the angle at which the arrowhead got stuck in the spine suggests that the man was shot from above).[59] In the third presumed decapitation grave from Sandomierz (101), the headless body was buried in a supine position and orientated E-W. An additional peculiarity was that this grave was isolated from others in the cemetery. All of these graves are usually interpreted as belonging to revenants or vampires, but it is possible that they instead represent burials of convicts.

Grave 404 from the early medieval cemetery at Sowinki in Greater Poland has been interpreted by its excavator, Andrzej Krzyszowski, as belonging to a decapitated individual (**Fig. 5.22** and **Fig. 5.23**).[60] The skeleton was relatively well preserved (including the vertebrae) but the skull was completely missing. Krzyszowski observes that the pit was prepared specifically with the intention of containing the headless body, and would have been too short to include the head as well. No traces of disturbance have been identified and there were no internal constructions within the grave pit (e.g. stones or wooden lining) the presence of which could possibly lead to post-depositional displacement or destruction of the skull. Following typical interpretative trends in Polish archaeology in the 1990s, Krzyszowski regards this grave as displaying traces of 'anti-vampire' practices, or possibly belonging to an individual who died in an unusual way, perhaps by being hanged.[61] While I remain skeptical about the 'vampire' interpretation, the location of this grave in the peripheral area of the cemetery, together with its unusual orientation along the NW-SE axis, strongly suggests an attempt to mark out and isolate this individual from the rest of the dead. Although the grave did not contain any objects, it is noteworthy that its plan shows traces of charcoal in the area of the man's spine, and that there was also a small stone between his legs (nos. 2–3 in **Fig. 5.23**). Both the charcoal and the stone may have

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[58] Gąssowski 1969, p. 408.

[59] Stanaszek 1998, p. 25.

[60] Krzyszowski 1992, p. 87; 2000.

[61] Krzyszowski 1992, p. 87; 2000, p. 123.

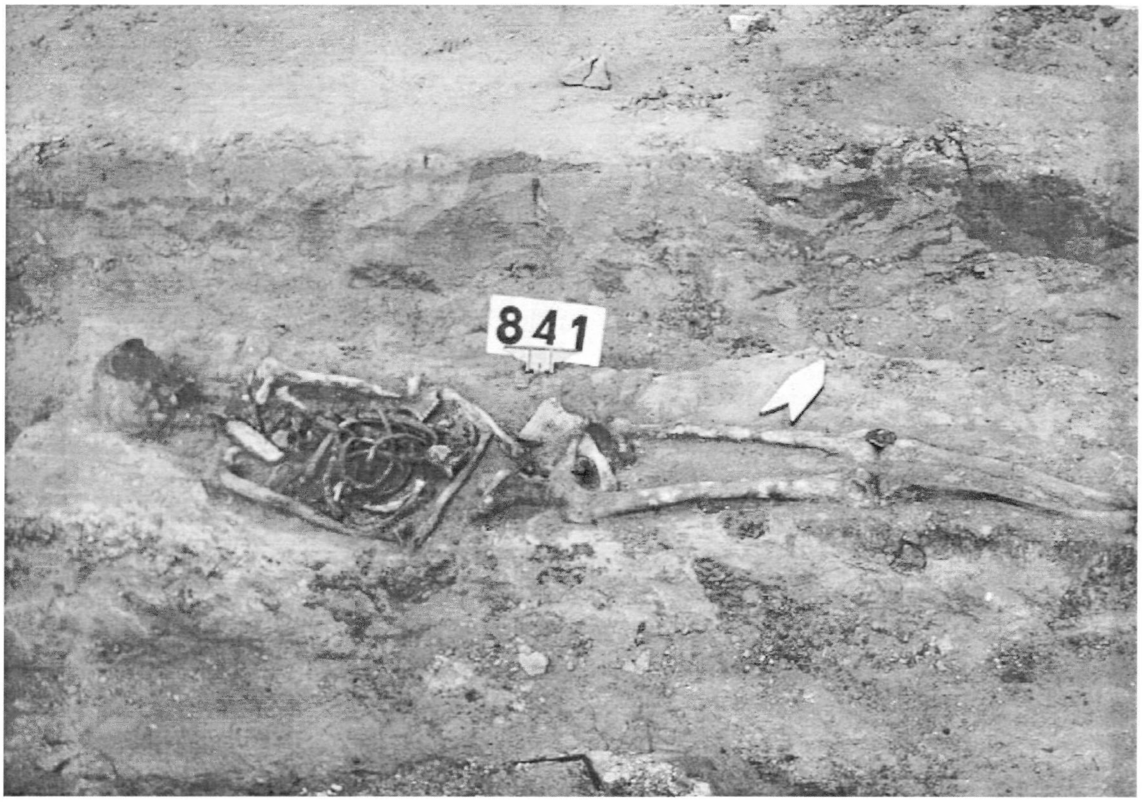

Fig. 5.15. Photo of grave 841 from Cedynia. Collections of Muzeum Regionalne w Cedyni. Used by kind permission.

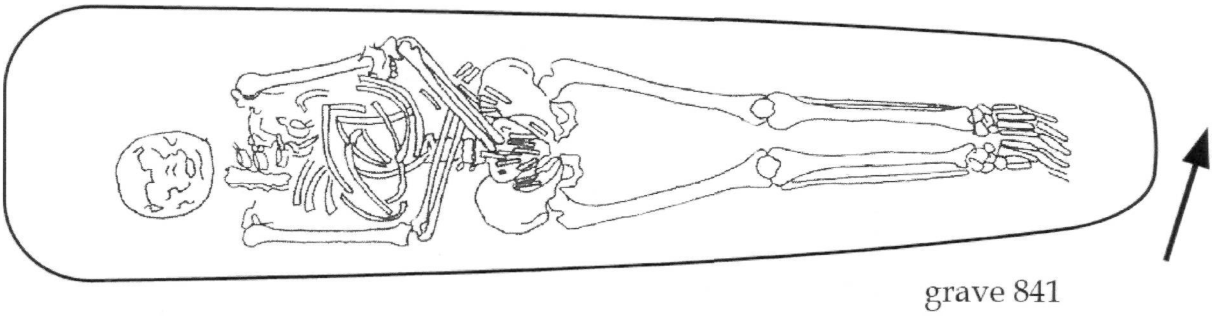

Fig. 5.16. Plan of grave 841 from Cedynia. Reproduced after Porzeziński 2008, p. 35.

been accidental inclusions in the grave fill, but it is not unlikely that they represent traces of premeditated ritual acts. It is possible that grave 404 from Sowinki was that of a convict. This hypothesis is further supported by the remarkably shallow depth of the pit; as Krzyszowski observes, the bones were found only 35–40cm beneath the topsoil, which implies a hasty and rather careless act of burial.[62] Interring a potential revenant in a pit so shallow would not have been acceptable, since people would have most likely feared his return. Therefore, the interpretation of this grave as belonging to a criminal appears substantiated.

A decapitated individual was also found in grave 15(29) from the early medieval cemetery at Wolin Młynówka, already mentioned in Chapter 4.[63] The man had been buried with his legs flexed and crossed and with his chest and face directed towards the ground (a partly prone position). Upon excavation, the head

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[62] Krzyszowski 2000, p. 120.

[63] Wokroj 1967, p. 304; Wojtasik 1968, pp. 17, 206–207; Żydok 2004, pp. 48, 50; Wrzesiński 2008b, p. 153; Gardeła 2011a, pp. 39, 45–46; Stanaszek 2016b, pp. 28–29.

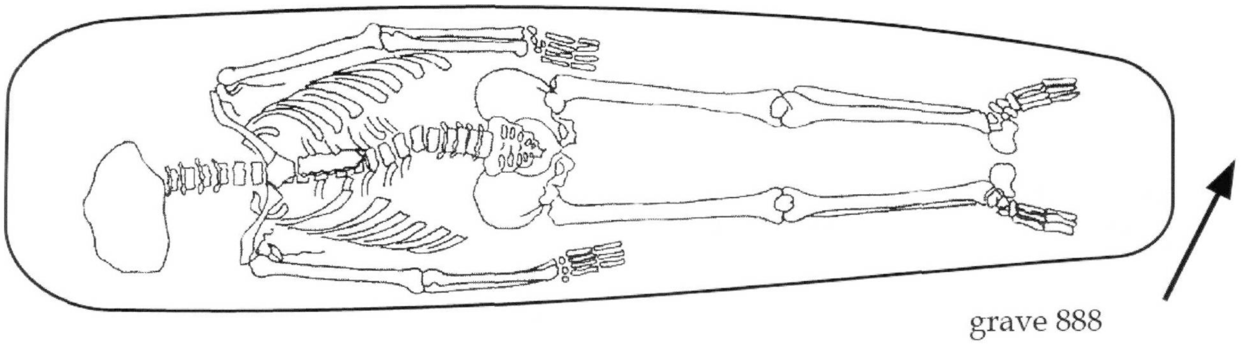

Fig. 5.17. Plan of grave 888 from Cedynia. Reproduced after Porzeziński 2008, p. 35.

was found separated from the body and lying close to the man's spatula, which is a clear signal that it was cut off. Over the years, various interpretations of this grave have been offered in the academic literature: for example, Franiszek Wokroj[64] regarded it as that of a 'strzyga', whereas Jerzy Wojtasik[65] only saw it as a reflection of some 'beliefs or magic practices' without going into any detail. Łukasz Maurycy Stanaszek, on the other hand, includes it in his list of the so-called anti-vampire graves.[66]

Finally, we should mention the well-known eleventh-century grave of a headless man from Wolin Wzgórze Wisielców (see also Chapter 3).[67] On the floor of the grave, between the lower extremities, was an oval shape

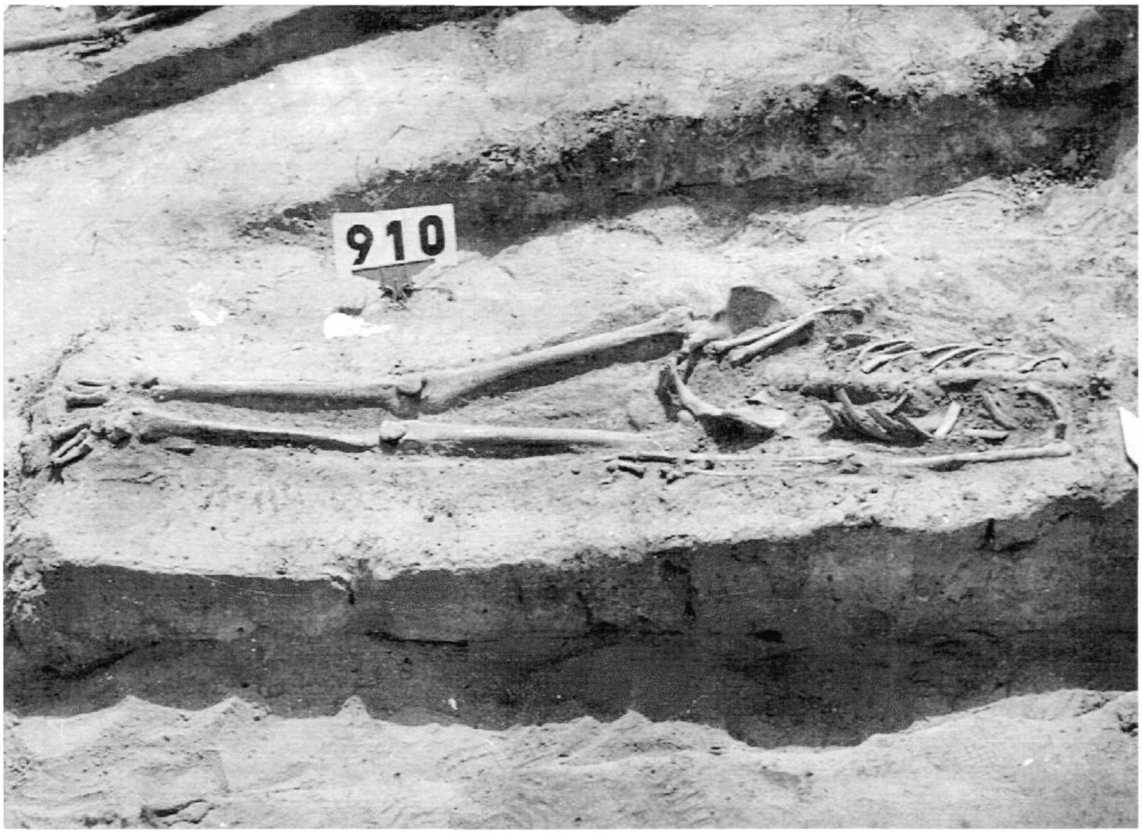

Fig. 5.18. Photo of grave 910 from Cedynia. Collections of Muzeum Regionalne w Cedyni. Used by kind permission.

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[64] Wokroj 1967, p. 304.

[65] Wojtasik 1968, p. 207.

[66] Stanaszek 2016b, pp. 28–29.

[67] Cnotliwy 1963; Malinowska-Łazarczyk 1982(I), p. 107; Krzyszowski 2000, p. 123.

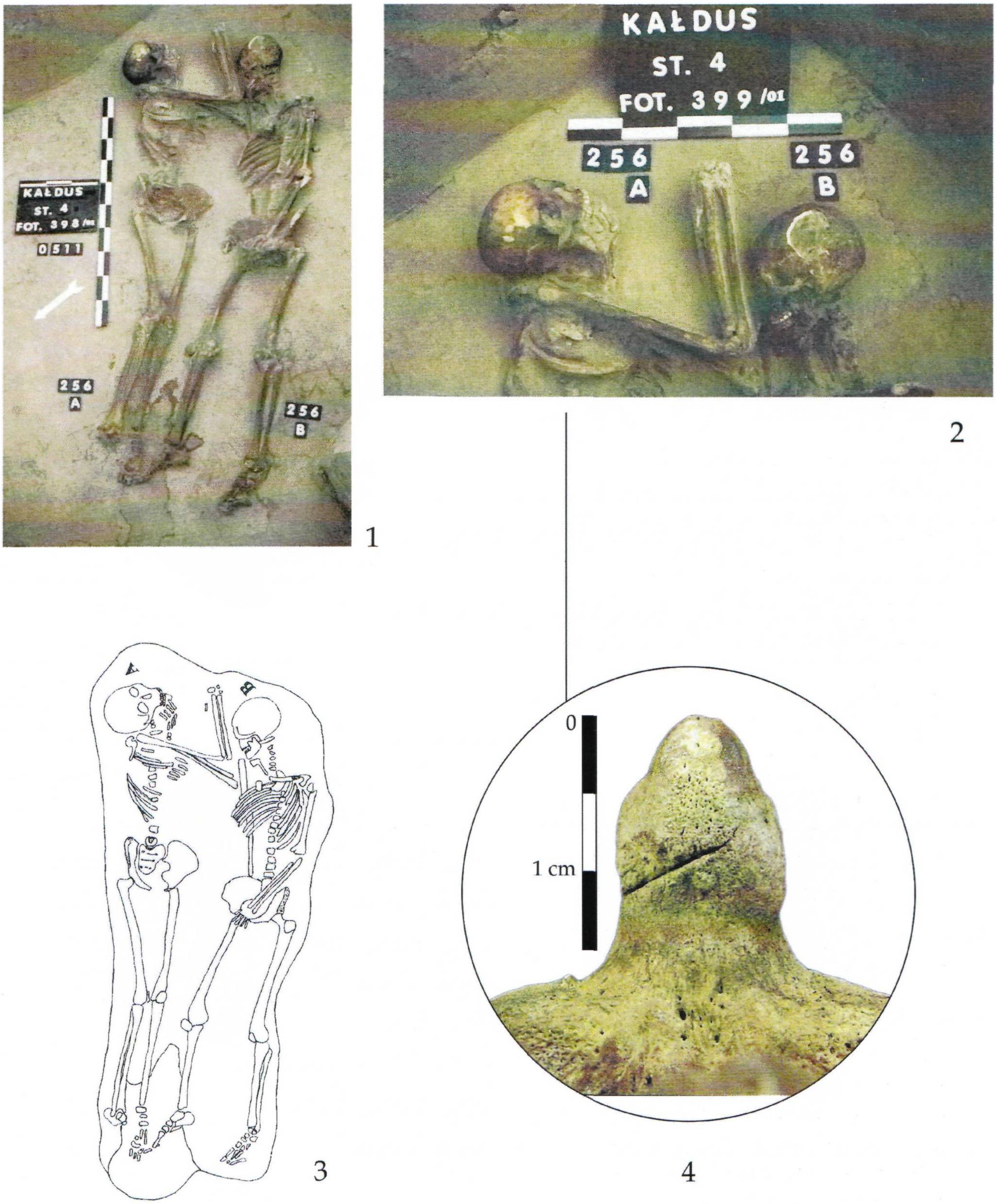
KAŁDUS
ST. 4
FOT. 398/01
0511
256
A
256
B
1
KAŁDUS
ST. 4
FOT. 399/01
256
A
256
B
2
A
B
3
0
1 cm
4

Fig. 5.19. Grave 256/01 from Kałdus. 1 – Photo of the grave. Reproduced after Bojarski, Chudziak, Drozd, Koperkiewicz, Kozłowski, Stawska 2010, p. 391. 2 – Detail of the grave showing the two decapitated skulls. Reproduced after Bojarski, Chudziak, Drozd, Koperkiewicz, Kozłowski, Stawska 2010, p. 435. 3 – Drawing of the grave. Reproduced after Bojarski, Chudziak, Drozd, Koperkiewicz, Kozłowski, Stawska 2010, p. 256. 4 – Cervical vertebrae of skeleton B showing a deep cut mark. Reproduced after Bojarski, Chudziak, Drozd, Koperkiewicz, Kozłowski, Stawska 2010, p. 435.

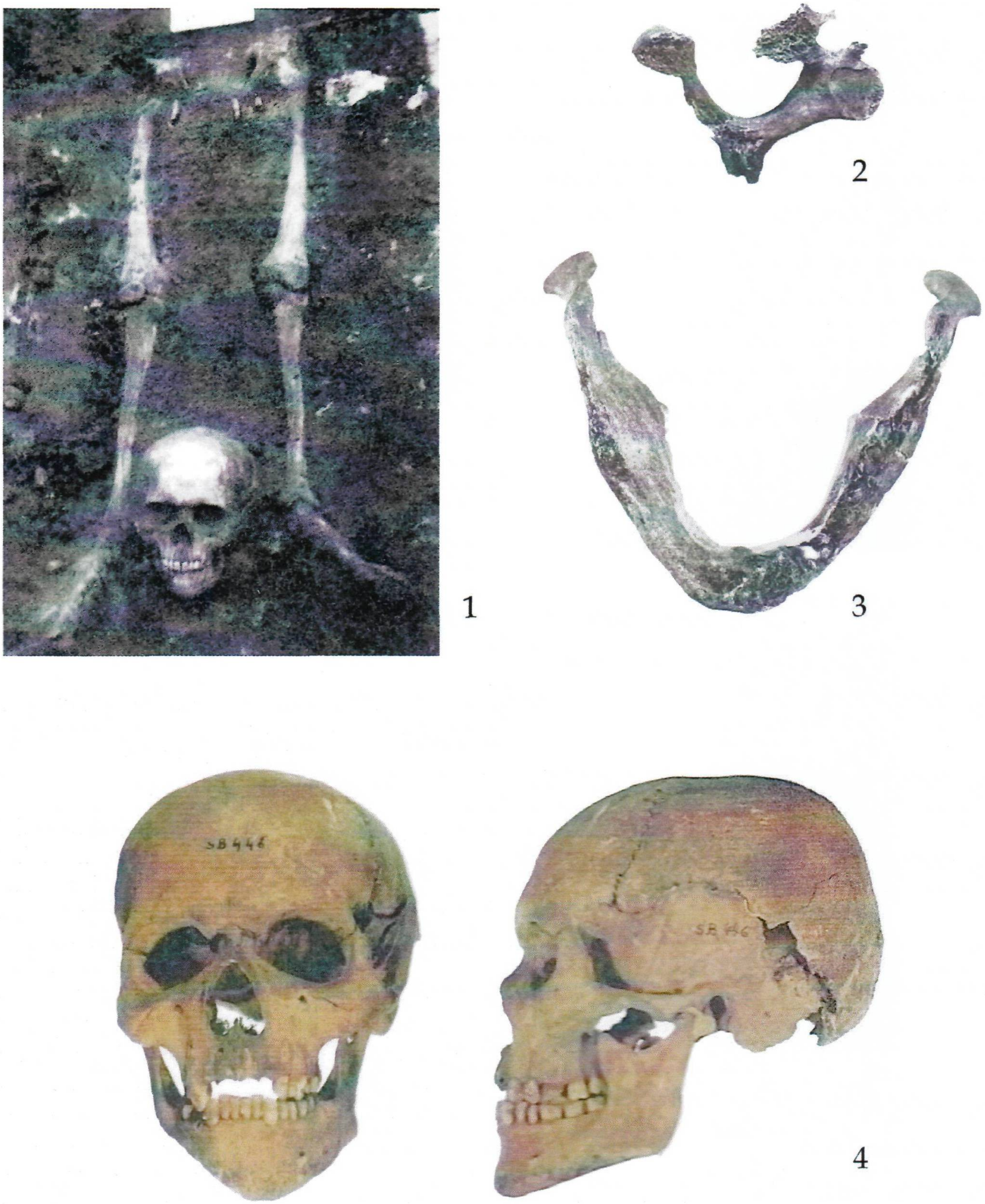

Fig. 5.20. Grave 446 from Stary Brześć Kujawski. 1 – Photo of the grave with the skull placed between the lower limbs. 2 – Third cervical vertebrae with clear cut marks from decapitation. 3 – Mandible with clear cut marks from decapitation. 4 – Skull. All images reproduced after Stanaszek 2016b, pp. 24–25.

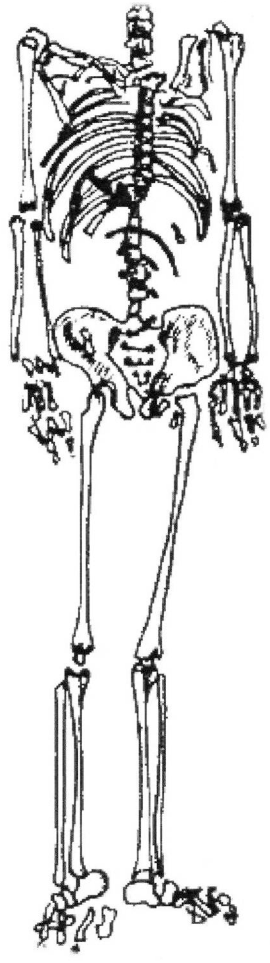

Fig. 5.21. Grave 26 from Sandomierz. Reproduced after Stanaszek 1998, p. 25.

which could be the trace of a wooden post that once stood there. In a number of studies, this grave has been interpreted as belonging to a convict whose head was decapitated and attached to the post between his legs, thereby making it visible on the surface. I find this interpretation quite probable, especially given the fact, that in early modern times, the area where this cemetery was located served the role of an execution site. The use of a judicial space for the burial of convicts could have been regarded as part of its purpose.

Spatial location of decapitated burials within cemeteries

Similar to the cases of prone burials discussed in Chapter 4, most early medieval decapitation burials from Poland were discovered in non-churchyard or rural cemeteries. They are usually 'integrated' within the particular site, and surrounded by other, more 'normal' graves. Therefore, their spatial location does not, by itself, indicate any deviant status. There are some exceptions to this rule, however, with several examples of decapitated individuals on the boundaries of cemeteries. Among them is the remarkable double grave 256/01 from Kałdus (site 4), which was located on the south-eastern boundary of the cemetery. It has been argued that this might indicate that the two individuals died during some very unfortunate event or that they were executed, which would have led to a desire to marginalise them after death.[68] Also, the grave of the individual buried at Samborzec (grave 4) was located on the boundary of the cemetery. The grave 101 from Sandomierz was also isolated, and the same can be said about grave 404 from Sowinki (**Fig. 5.24**), which was located in the peripheral area of the cemetery.

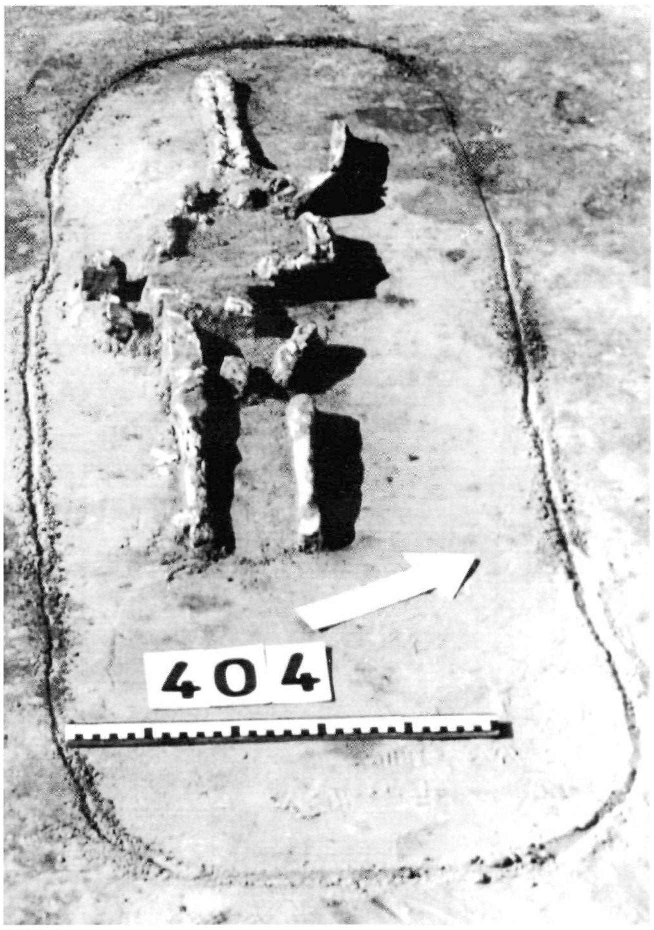

Fig. 5.22. Photo of grave 404 from Sowinki. After Krzyszowski 2000, p. 122. Collections of Muzeum Archeologiczne w Poznaniu. Used by kind permission.

As for the other graves discussed above, most of them do not display any unusual characteristics with regard to their spatial location. It must be emphasised, however, that sometimes it is impossible to determine

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[68] Stawska, Bojarski, Chudziak 2010b, p. 77; Kozłowski 2008, p. 105.

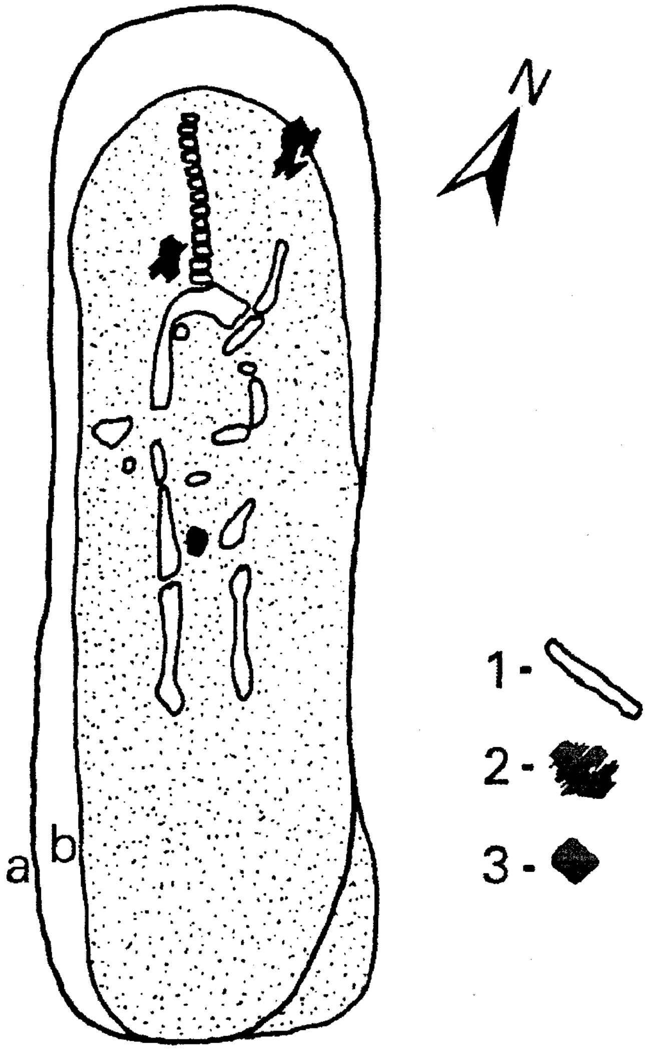

Fig. 5.23. Plan of grave 404 from Sowinki. Reproduced after Krzyszowski 2000, p. 122. Collections of Muzeum Archeologiczne w Poznaniu. Used by kind permission.

where exactly graves were located due to the poor quality of recording or lack of cemetery plans.

Grave goods in decapitated burials

Similar to other variants of atypical burials from early medieval Poland, those with decapitations are usually unfurnished, although a few of them do contain some grave goods. The individual interred in grave 60 at Cedynia (site 2) had a ring made of bronze tape with an inscription HANUT+HUNUT (**Fig. 5.25**), and grave 215 from the same site included a bronze temple ring (**Fig. 5.26**). As mentioned above, however, in the latter case it is unclear if the buried individual was actually decapitated. Particularly remarkable in terms of its furnishing is grave 552 at Cedynia, where the deceased was buried with a leather belt with a bronze buckle and fifteen bronze fittings (**Fig. 5.27**).

Apart from the examples from Cedynia, several presumed decapitation burials from other parts of Poland also contained grave goods, usually in the form of knives. A knife lay on the chest of the individual buried in grave 4 at Samborzec, and in grave 10 from Sandomierz a knife was found between the deceased person's ribs. It has been suggested that the individual from Samborzec was stabbed, but this interpretation seems unlikely; rather, it is more probable that the knife was originally laid on the chest and subsided after the decomposition of the soft tissue. Grave 404 from Sowinki contained some pieces of charred wood and a small stone between the legs of the deceased – it is unclear whether or not these represent accidental inclusions in the fill or are traces of intentional ritual acts. The stone between the legs is particularly intriguing in this context, but its meaning remains obscure.

Decapitated burials in combination with other atypical practices

Decapitated burials from early medieval Poland occasionally coincide with other atypical funerary practices. This is particularly visible in the case of Cedynia, where, as we have seen above, most of the alleged decapitation burials also included stones that substituted for missing heads. Moreover, the position of the upper and lower extremities of the individual buried in grave 841 from Cedynia suggests that the legs may have been tied, or alternatively that the person was interred in a shroud.[69] The man buried in grave 15(29) at Wolin Młynówka had his legs flexed and his chest directed towards the ground, implying a partly prone position. Additionally, the flexing of the lower extremities and the fact that the right leg lay *over* the left could imply that they were tied prior to burial. Another example of decapitation combined with prone burial is that of grave 24/57 from Kałdus.

It is also noteworthy that in a number of instances the disarticulated heads of the deceased were positioned in the graves face down (Cedynia 186, Milicz 229, Niemcza 66, Wolin 15(29)). This intentional practice might perhaps imply a fear of the evil eye, the fatal gaze which could bring misfortune or even death.[70] As I have

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[69] Porzeziński 2008, p. 17.

[70] Hocart 1938.

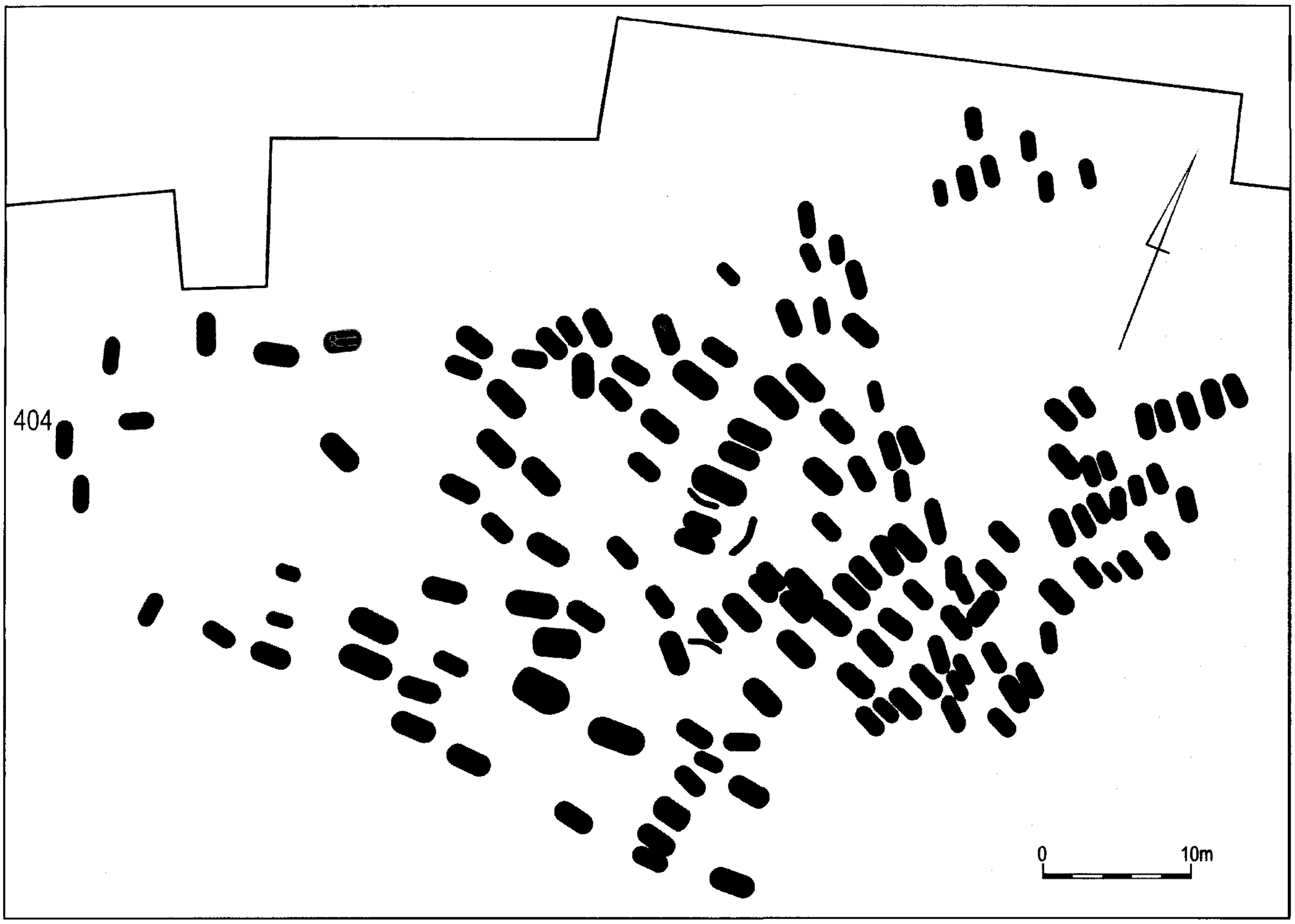

Fig. 5.24. Plan of the early medieval cemetery at Sowinki. Courtesy of Andrzej Krzyszowski.

mentioned in Chapter 4, the evil eye is a widespread cross-cultural phenomenon and was probably known among the medieval Slavs as well. It seems that grave 76 from Cedynia, where decapitation coincided with prone burial, could also be interpreted as suggesting a fear of the evil eye.

3. BURIALS OF SKULLS?

Some of the most interesting phenomena of Slavic early medieval funerary archaeology are the discoveries of so-called 'burials of human skulls' – that is, instances where only a skull is found in an archaeological feature (usually a pit), with the rest of the postcranial skeleton missing. Over the last decade or so this topic has been studied by several scholars,[71] most notably by Magdalena Felis, who has also assembled a corpus of 'burials' of severed heads and attempted to unravel the meaning of this practice. We shall carefully review her ideas below.

In approaching this topic, the first problem that needs to be addressed is whether the discoveries of single buried skulls really represent conscious intentional practice, or whether these are just the remains of accidentally disturbed graves. In doing so, we need to acknowledge the fact that the skull is one of the most durable parts of the human skeleton and often the last to decompose after burial. This claim also finds solid support in archaeological evidence from prehistoric and medieval cemeteries in many parts of Europe, where skulls tend to be among the best-preserved skeletal remains in inhumation graves.

Nevertheless, if we accept the possibility that at least some of the so-called burials of skulls from Poland represent intentional acts, we need to ask whether what was buried was actually a severed head (with all the soft tissues), or merely a defleshed skull.[72] The next important question that ought to be posed concerns the method of severing the head from the spine – was

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[71] Felis 2007; Kajkowski 2013.

[72] Felis 2007, p. 99.

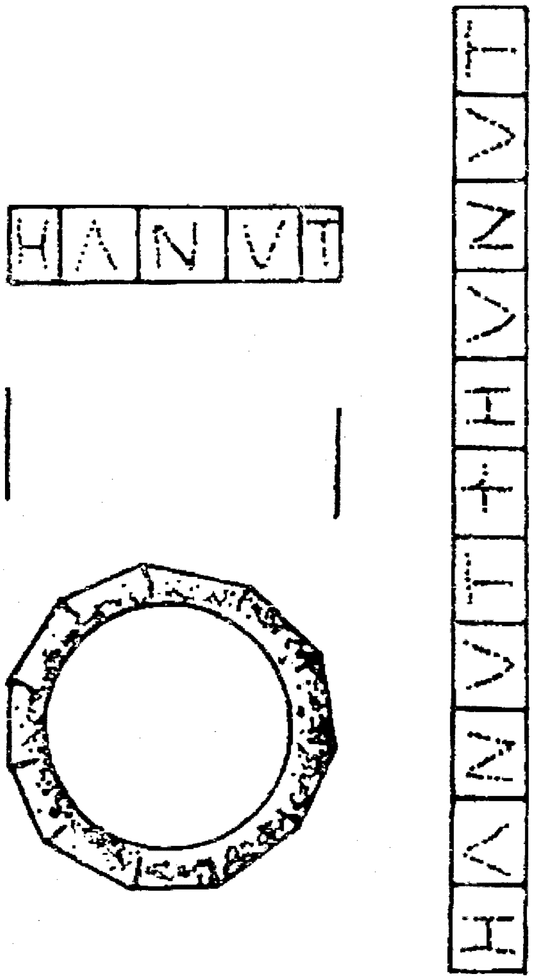

Fig. 5.25. Ring from grave 60 at Cedynia with an inscription HANUT+HUNUT. After Malinowska-Łazarczyk 1982(I), p. 134.

it done during an execution or during combat, and what weapon or tool exactly was used in the process (sword, axe, knife)? The final question that remains to be answered is why anyone would want to do this and what the practical and/or symbolic meaning behind it was. Before we attempt to interpret these phenomena, we shall first start with an empirical overview of the corpus of archaeological evidence assembled by Felis and other scholars.

In her study, Felis has isolated three different types of burials or deposits of skulls from early medieval sites in Poland:[73]

- Burials of single skulls without postcranial skeletons
- Graves of individuals with an additional head/skull
- Graves or deposits of more than one skull in a single pit

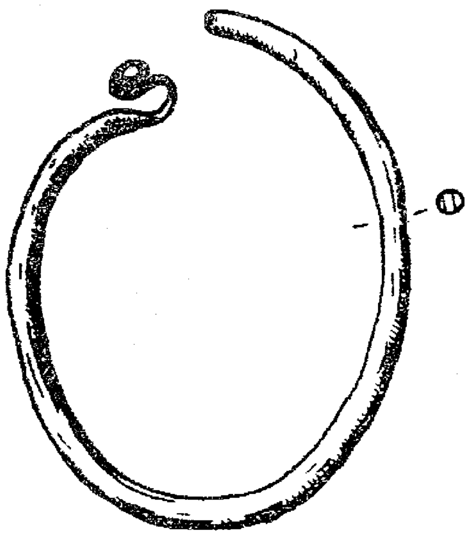

Fig. 5.26. Bronze temple ring from grave 215 at Cedynia. After Malinowska-Łazarczyk 1982(I), p. 142.

Because all of these categories have very specific characteristics and give rise to various source-critical problems, we shall discuss them separately.

Burials of single skulls without postcranial skeletons

One of the earliest finds of single skulls without postcranial skeletons was discovered in an early medieval cemetery at Ulejno in Greater Poland, where it was buried with stones arranged along three of its sides.[74] The interpretation of this case is difficult and is additionally hampered by the fact that the discovery was made in the early twentieth century and no field documentation, apart from a short notice in Rajewski's article, is preserved. It is quite possible, therefore, that this peculiar find does not represent an intentional head/skull burial or deposit, but is rather part of a disturbed grave.

Further examples of burials or deposits of single skulls were recovered in the 1930s, in the cemetery at Ostrów Lednicki in Greater Poland, an important site dated between the eleventh and twelfth centuries.[75] The field documentation from the excavations did not survive the turmoil of the Second World War and the only information that is preserved today comes from the work of Franciszek Wokroj which, unfortunately,

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[73] Felis 2007, pp. 100–101.

[74] Rajewski 1937, pp. 42, 57; Felis 2007, p. 100.

[75] Felis 2007, p. 100.

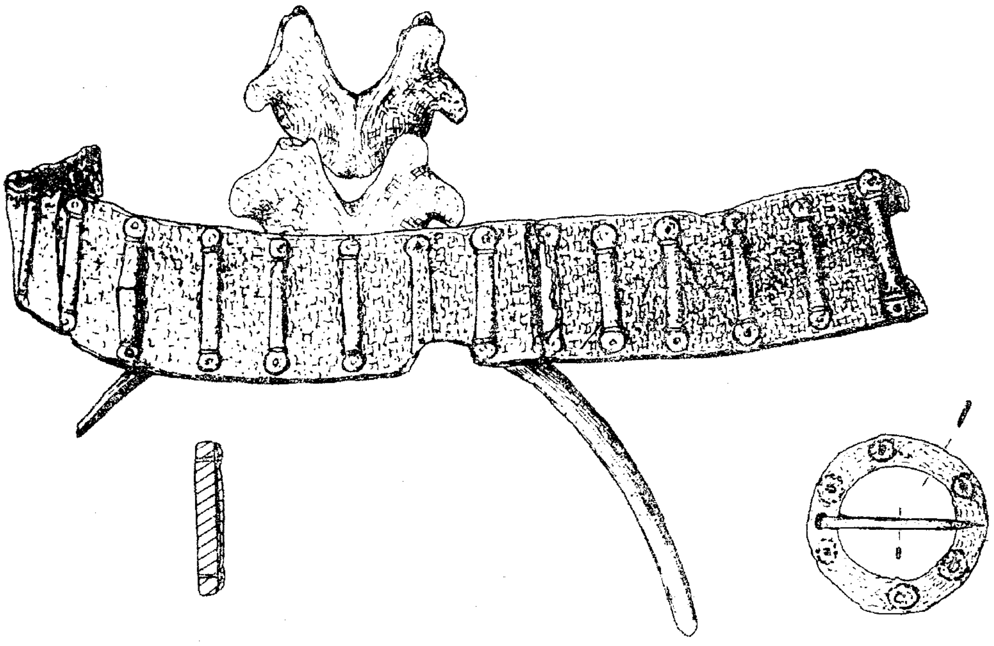

Fig. 5.27. Leather belt with a bronze buckle and fittings from grave 552 at Cedynia. After Malinowska-Łazarczyk 1982(I), p. 151.

does not offer much detail.[76] According to Wokroj, three burials or deposits of skulls were discovered at Ostrów Lednicki. Apparently, the skull from grave 807 lay on top of some stones and was additionally covered with stone rubble.[77] Another skull from grave 809 was lying face down surrounded by ten stones.[78] A single skull was also found in grave 818.[79] Due to the lack of field plans or photographs and rather laconic descriptions in Wokroj's publication, the interpretation of these finds is highly problematic and it is impossible to determine whether they were actual intentional burials or deposits of single skulls, or just the remains of disturbed graves.

Another alleged skull burial was discovered in 1939 at Chróścina in Silesia while digging for sand near a ferry crossing on the shore of Nysa Kłodzka River.[80] The skull was buried at a depth of 1.40m and next to it lay a unique clay vessel with grooved line ornamentation and a representation of an animal, probably a horse (**Fig. 5.28**). On the back of the skull was a triangular hole with sharp edges which implies that it was pierced with a sharp object (spear?) or perhaps attached to a post of some sort. Based on the design of the ceramic vessel, the find from Chróścina has been dated to the tenth or eleventh century. The presence of a ceramic pot with an image of an animal might suggest that together with the skull it formed an intentional ritual deposit, perhaps an offering to one of the pagan gods or supernatural beings. As I have mentioned in Chapters 1 and 2, in Slavic pre-Christian beliefs horses had many symbolic meanings and were associated with the otherworld and the god Weles/Triglav.[81] However, we should also not rule out the possibility what was found at Chróścina was merely a disturbed grave.

An interesting instance of an alleged skull burial or deposit was discovered at Płock Wzgórze Tumskie (**Fig. 5.29**).[82] The skull, which belonged to a young girl, was placed on a layer of stones and surrounded by three clay vessels. According to Włodzimierz Szafrański, the stone layer may have played the role of an altar.[83] Nearby was a kind of stone pestle and a phallic-shaped object made of antler as well as a posthole, perhaps suggesting that a statue had originally stood there. In Szafrański's opinion, this site may have been used for pagan rituals from as early as the ninth century.

Also at Wąsosz in Silesia, a pit was found containing a single human skull and some disarticulated bones.[84] This case is highly problematic, even though it has previously been included in studies and publications on skull burials and deposits. In my view, this find

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[76] Wokroj 1953.

[77] Wokroj 1953, p. 35; Felis 2007, p. 100.

[78] Wokroj 1953, p. 35; Felis 2007, p. 100.

[79] Wokroj 1953, p. 35; Felis 2007, p. 100.

[80] Wachowski 1975, pp. 79–80; Limisiewicz 2002, p. 358; Felis 2007, p. 100.

[81] See, for example, Łukaszyk 2012.

[82] Felis 2007, p. 100.

[83] Szafrański 1987, pp. 374, 379.

[84] Limisiewicz 2002, p. 354; Felis 2007, p. 101.

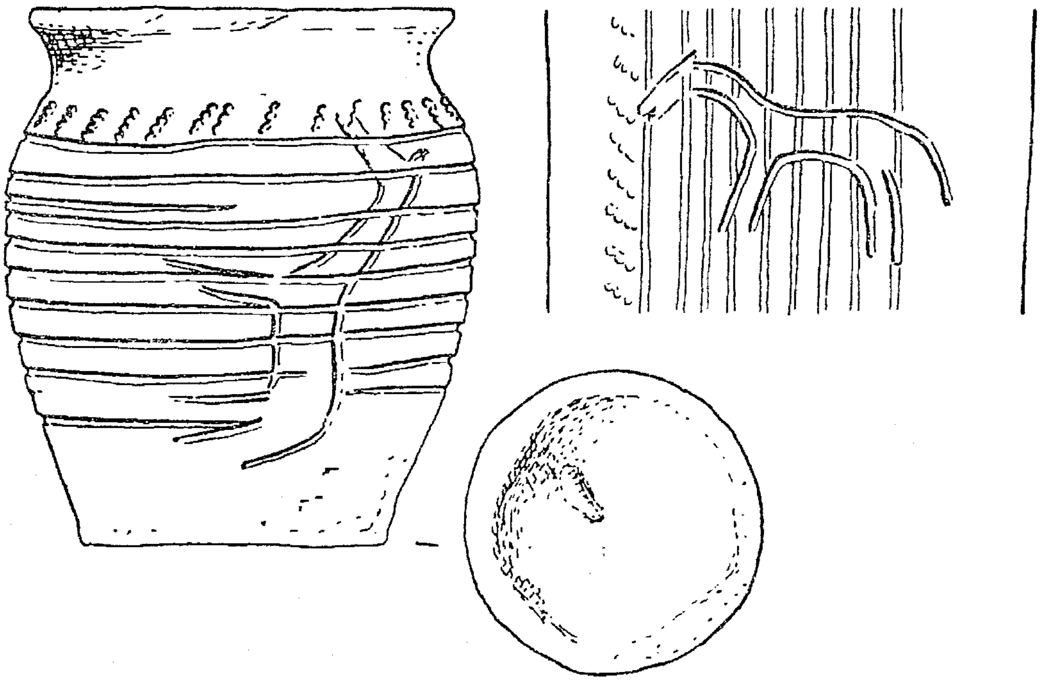

Fig. 5.28. Unique clay vessel from Chróścina with a representation of a horse. After Wachowski 1975, p. 80.

from Wąsosz simply represents a poorly preserved or potentially disturbed grave.

The last example of a possible skull burial mentioned by Felis in her study was discovered in the cemetery at Psary in Central Poland. In grave 7 lay a single skull without any traces of postcranial skeleton.[85] Yet again, this looks more like a poorly preserved or potentially disturbed grave.

It must be emphasised that, in her article, Felis omitted several other potential examples of skull burials or deposits, including those from Jabłończ Wielki, Kadłus and Wolin. The cemetery at Jabłończ Wielki contained cremation graves covered by mounds and several inhumations.[86] Mounds 3 and 4, located in the very centre of the site, included disarticulated human remains. According to Zoll-Adamikowa, mound 3 had a stone layer beneath which were two circles of stones adjacent to each other.[87] In one of these circles (circle S) was a 'chamber' built of stones containing an iron buckle and a pile of disarticulated bones. To the east of this stone circle were two further stone chambers, between which two human skulls were found. Yet another skull lay inside one of the chambers. There was also a stone chamber in the eastern part of mound 4, but without any skeletal remains. Another small chamber constructed out of three stone slabs and containing a single human skull was found in the north-western part of the mound.

A single skull was also found at Kałdus in the so-called 'layer of bones' (Polish *warstwa z kośćmi*). Based on the stratigraphic context of its discovery, the skull was initially dated to the tenth century and considered by some scholars to be associated with some 'ritual practices' and 'bloody sacrifices'.[88] However, a radiocarbon analysis conducted later has revealed that the skull is actually several centuries older than the layer in which it was found. In the light of this evidence, Kamil Kajkowski has argued that the presence of a very 'old' skull within the 'layer of bones' might potentially suggest that it had been taken from a reopened prehistoric grave and reused for ritual purposes in the Early Middle Ages.[89]

Also during archaeological excavations at Srebrne Wzgórze (Silver Hill) at Wolin, a single skull was found in one of the fireplaces lying between stones and among fragmented pieces of pottery and bones.[90] Around 1.5m from the fireplace was a pit with two other human skulls and a ceramic vessel. Specialist analyses have revealed that the skulls belonged to an adult man, a woman, and a child. Interestingly, the skulls of the woman and the child were heavily deformed during the lives of these

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[85] Trębaczkiewicz 1963, p. 135; Felis 2007, p. 101.

[86] This site has been recently discussed in some detail by Kajkowski 2013, pp. 158–159.

[87] Zoll-Adamikowa 1975, p. 97.

[88] Chudziak 2006, pp. 79–80.

[89] Kajkowski 2014b, p. 141.

[90] Kajkowski 2014b, p. 141.

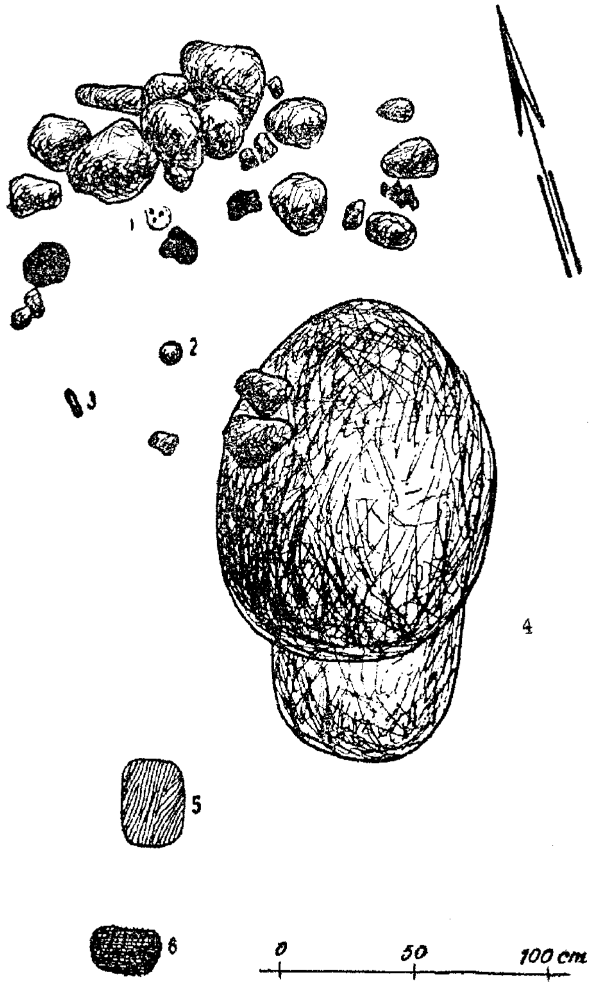

Fig. 5.29. Early medieval skull deposit discovered at Płock Wzgórze Tumskie. 1 – child's skull. 2 – stone mace head. 3 – Antler object. 4 – Fireplace. 5 – Remains of a wooden post. 6 – Clay vessel. After Urbańczyk 1962, p. 152.

individuals (by tying them with bands), which in effect gave them a very peculiar and elongated appearance. This case is similar to the one from Chróścina discussed above, since the single skulls were also accompanied by a ceramic vessel. Before jumping to far-fetched conclusions, however, it is important to bear in mind that the two sites, Chróścina and Wolin, are located several hundred kilometers away, so the parallels may just be a matter of coincidence rather than an example of a conscious and widespread ritual practice among the Slavs.

Additional skulls in graves

The second category of 'skull burials' isolated by Felis includes instances where severed skulls, without postcranial skeletons, were added to inhumation graves. They are not easy to identify, because it is often difficult to determine whether the skull was added to a preexisting grave which had been reopened specifically for that purpose, or whether the act of burying an individual with an additional head/skull of another person was simultaneous. We also lack textual sources that would help us reveal what the practice of burying additional skulls with the dead may have meant for the early medieval Slavs. Was this custom associated with some particular beliefs? Did the skull play the role of an additional attribute or grave gift for the deceased in their journey to the Otherworld? Or did it represent a *pars pro toto* burial of someone related to the individual whose entire body was interred?

One grave of this type, labelled 15/92, was discovered in an early medieval cemetery at Dziekanowice in Greater Poland. It belonged to an adult individual who died at the age of 50–55 years old (*maturus* II).[91] The man had a knife and an unidentified iron object. On the left part of his pelvis was the skull of a child who died between 3–5 years of age (*infans* I). The child and the man were facing each other and a small temple ring was found nearby. While it is possible that what was buried in the man's grave was just the single skull of a child, it is not unlikely that the postcranial part of the child's skeleton simply decomposed in the course of various post-depositional processes.

Similar funerary practices to that described above, have also been noted in the early medieval cemetery at Czersk in Masovia, which was used from the second half of the twelfth to the beginning of the thirteenth century.[92] Additional skulls were found in many of the graves buried in various different ways – by the heads of the deceased, by their legs or on the pelvis. A substantial number of these can be explained by rather prosaic factors – they may have resulted from post-depositional processes leading to the decomposition of other parts of the postcranial skeleton, or from the layered nature of the cemetery, which contains many burials cutting into or overlaying earlier interments. In light of all this, extreme caution is advised in interpreting this site as one in which the dead were regularly buried with additional skulls of other individuals.

Finally, it is worth mentioning the intriguing case of the Krakus Mound in Kraków, the upper layers of which apparently contained the skeleton of a child and

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[91] Felis 2007, p. 101.

[92] Bronicka-Rauhut 1998.

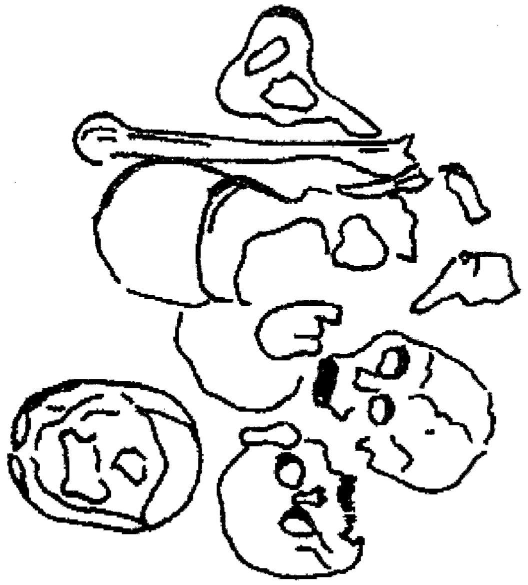

Fig. 5.30. Pit with skulls discovered at Giecz. After Indycka 2000, p. 85.

fragments of an adult man's skull.[93] Because this find is documented and described in a rudimentary manner, any attempt to interpret it would be pure speculation so I will refrain from discussing it any further.

Multiple skulls in one pit

The last category of so-called 'skull burials' includes cases where several skulls were deposited in a single pit. Two examples of such burials were discovered in 1959 in an early medieval cemetery at Giecz in Greater Poland (**Fig. 5.30**).[94] Grave 12/59 contained seven skulls, two of which belonged to women and four to men. The second grave, labelled 13/59, had four skulls, three of which belonged to adult men. Regrettably, these finds have been published in a very laconic manner which hampers any further interpretation. We might speculate, however, that if the cemetery served the additional role of a place for occasional executions (as suggested by the discoveries of other types of atypical burials), the skulls may have been displayed on the surface and afterwards collected and buried together in a single pit.

Burials of skulls: Discussion and interpretation

Burials of skulls, if they really represent intentional premeditated acts, can be interpreted in a number of ways. In the archaeological studies published so far, they have been regarded as belonging to individuals who died in combat and whose head was cut off. It has also been speculated that they are examples of the so-called 'partial burials', that is burials of individuals whose complete bodies for some reason could not be transported to the intended place of interment. This may have happened when a person died far away from home and when it was for some reason necessary to bring at least part of that individual back to where he or she belonged. It is also possible that some of these single skull burials represent trophies or that they are burials of criminals. Likewise, we cannot exclude the possibility that they signify traces of some other very specific ritual practices, the meaning of which remains obscure and cannot be unravelled due to lack of textual sources or other evidence upon which we could base an interpretation.

In her study, Felis has mentioned the idea that the occurrence of several skulls in one pit could be related to ancestor worship.[95] In this light, burials of skulls could reflect a ritual practice that required them to be removed from graves on particular occasions. While this idea is interesting and finds parallels among some cultures (even those still existing today)[96] we, unfortunately, have no good evidence for this ritual in any textual sources pertaining to the early medieval Slavs in Poland.[97]

As we have seen above, despite some similarities, the so-called 'burials of skulls' are quite a broad group of finds. Their diversity suggests that their underlying meanings were also manifold. Therefore, as in the case of other atypical burials discussed in this monograph, it is necessary to approach each of them individually and to remain critical and careful in interpreting them. It is also important to empahasise the fact that many so-called 'skull burials' come from very old excavations and are not documented to a standard we would normally expect today. Moreover, most of the skulls have not been subjected to anthropological analyses which could potentially reveal more details about who they belonged to and how these people died. In the conclusion to her seminal article, Felis has rightly observed that it is also quite possible that a number of these alleged 'skull burials' are merely products of our modern interpretations: in reality they could be the only remaining traces of otherwise 'normal' burials in which the postcranial skeletons have fully decomposed.[98]

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[93] Jamka 1965, p. 200; Kotlarczyk 1979, p. 58; Kajkowski 2014b, p. 141.

[94] Indycka 2000, p. 85; 2005; Felis 2007, pp. 101, 103.

[95] Felis 2007, p. 103. See also Bronicka-Rauhut 1998, p. 16.

[96] See Armit 2012.

[97] On ancestor worship in Slavic folklore, see Wenska 2012.

4. INTERPRETING DECAPITATED BURIALS IN EARLY MEDIEVAL POLAND

We have now examined different categories of decapitation burials from Polish archaeological sites that date to the period spanning the late tenth and thirteenth centuries. In addition to this, we have also explored the peculiar practice of burying single skulls without any postcranial remains. Some preliminary interpretations of these practices have already been provided above, but in the following sections, we will aim to look at them in the context of textual evidence as well.

Decapitation in textual sources

Based on extant textual sources it is possible to argue that, of all death penalties in early medieval Poland, beheading seems to have been the most honourable form of execution.[99] In contrast to hanging, for example, the act of decapitation did not affect the honour of the convict, nor that of his family. We find explicit confirmation for this claim in the work of Gallus Anonymous (*Gesta Principium Polonorum*), who describes a pagan revolt that took place in eleventh century Poland during the rule of Mieszko II. The chronicler writes that the pagans who rose against the clergy killed some of them with their swords (implying that they decapitated them), and that others who were not worthy of honourable death they stoned to death.[100]

In Latin textual sources that mention decapitation, we encounter the following terms for this practice: *decollare, decollandum, decollatio, decapitatio, capitis obtruncatio, capitis truncatio, ammissio capitis, decisio capitis, capitis abscisio, capitis perplectio, capite privari.*[101] It has been suggested that the abundance of terms for beheading might imply that it was the most common form of capital punishment in the early medieval period in Poland. However, it is equally plausible that the many names for beheading merely result from the writing style of different medieval authors.[102]

In his important study on capital punishment in early medieval Poland, Henryk Grajewski attempted to identify for what crimes execution by decapitation was performed. Based on a range of textual sources, it seems that it was especially robbers who were beheaded for their crimes.[103] For example, *Liber fundationis claustri sanctae Mariae Virginis in Heinrichow*[104] describes several examples of knights who were executed by beheading for committing robbery and other unlawful deeds. Among them was a knight called Burhard who, along with his brother, set fire to an estate at Muszkowice and committed a series of misdeeds including acts of theft.[105] Another man decapitated for his crimes was the notorious criminal and thief known as Stefan from Kobyla Głowa (most likely a knight as well), who is said to have 'hunted during the night for other people's things like a cat'.[106]

In Grajewski's opinion, extant textual sources indicate that, while knights who committed robbery were usually executed by beheading, the punishment for commoners for the same kind of offence would be hanging. This was not always the case, however, because according to *Rocznik Krasińskich*, on some exceptional occasions, rich townsfolk could also be decapitated.[107]

Apart from the sources discussed above that pertain specifically to the area of Poland, there are also several other textual accounts that describe beheadings conducted among the Pomeranian Slavs. All of these texts have been recently analysed in detail by Kamil Kajkowski, who has also tried to reveal the possible symbolic undertones of decapitation in this part of the Slavic world. The following discussion, therefore, is largely based on his important study.[108]

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[98] Felis 2007, p. 104.

[99] Grajewski 1956, p. 193.

[100] Grajewski 1956, p. 193.

[101] Listed after Grajewski 1956, p. 195.

[102] Grajewski 1956, p. 195.

[103] See examples in *Codex diplomaticus Majoris Polonia* (Polish *Kodeks Dyplomatyczny Wielkopolski*) and *Liber fundationis claustri sanctae Mariae Virginis in Heinrichow* (Polish *Księga henrykowska*). Also *Codex diplomaticus Majoris Polonia* mentions a knight who got sentenced to death for committing the crime of arson which caused damage to a cloister. Interestingly, the execution of this individual was performed by the monks themselves. For further details, see Grajewski 1956, pp. 196–197.

[104] Otherwise known in Poland as *Księga henrykowska.*

[105] Grajewski 1956, p. 117.

[106] Grajewski 1956, pp. 116–117.

[107] Grajewski 1956, p. 197.

[108] Kajkowski 2014b.

One of the earliest descriptions of beheading among the Pomeranian Slavs is recorded in Thietmar's *Chronicon* and relates how the Bohemian Duke Boleslav II the Pious (Polish Bolesław II Pobożny) besieged a certain stronghold on his way home from a military campaign. Having conquered the fortress and caught its lord, he gave him to the pagan Liutizi tribe, who immediately sacrificed the man to their gods by cutting his head off. As we read in Thietmar's account:

> Returning from there, he besieged a fortress called [...][109] and, with no opposition from the occupants, he conquered it along with its lord, whom he gave to the Liutizi for decapitation. Without delay, this sacrificial victim was offered to their supportive gods in front of the city and all departed for home.[110]

Kajkowski interprets the act of decapitation as a sacrifice intended to secure the pagans a safe passage home. He points out that this represents an interesting example of an '*ad hoc* offering' which, due to the unusual circumstances, was conducted on the spot and not in a specially designated sacred space (e.g. a sanctuary or temple).[111]

In addition to this example, the motif of sacrificing human heads to the pagan gods is recorded in several other written accounts pertaining to the Pomeranian Slavs. We find it in a document written by Bishop Adalgot of Magdeburg in 1108, who describes how the pagans celebrated their festivals. Adalgot not only says that the pagans would cut off the heads of Christians, but also claims that they would drink from cups filled with human blood.[112]

One of the most detailed descriptions of decapitation, with potentially ritualistic overtones, is provided in Adam of Bremen's *Gesta Hammaburgensis ecclesiae pontificum*.[113] The victim was a Christian bishop named John who, without much success, tried to preach the new faith among the pagan Pomeranians. Adam's account is worth quoting in full here:

> The aged bishop John was taken with other Christians in the city of Mecklenburg and held for triumph. And because he confessed Christ he was beaten with cudgels and then was led in mockery through one city of the Slavs after another. Since he could not be turned from the profession of Christ, his hands and feet were lopped off and his body was thrown upon the road. Cutting off his head, the barbarians fixed it on a spear and offered it to their god Redigast in token of their victory. These things were done in the chief city of the Slavs, Rethra, on the fourth day before the Ides of November.[114]

Kajkowski[115] noticed a parallel to this story in a passage from Helmold's *Chronica Slavorum* which relates the deeds of the Polabian prince Gottschalk, who fought vigorously against the pagans but in the end was executed by them.[116] Gottschalk was caught in an ambush and when his body was found after the fight the head was missing. It is not specified in the account why the head was cut off and where exactly it was taken, however.[117]

Another textual example of executing Christians by decapitation is recorded in *Ebbonis vita Ottonis*, an important medieval source that describes the deeds of Bishop Otto. We read in this account that the pagans were resistant to the Bishop's teachings and:

> (...) hardened themselves against him and on several occasions declared by their messengers that if any of his companions should presume to approach the borders of Ruthenia (Rugia), for the sake of preaching the gospel, their heads would be cut off forthwith and they should be exposed to be torn by wild beasts.[118]

Decapitations, in this case performed by Christian Saxons upon Slavic pagans, are also mentioned on two occasions in Widukind's *Res gestae Saxonicae*. In 929, after a battle at Łączyn, all of the captured Slavs were decapitated. In 955, a similar case occurred: Widukind writes that the Obodrite Duke Stoigniew was decapitated and that his head was attached to a post and publicly displayed.[119] In Kajkowski's opinion, the decapitation of the captives during the events described by Widukind had a didactic purpose and served as a warning for those who opposed to the rule of the German Emperor.

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[109] Unfortunately, the name of the fortress is not provided in the manuscript.

[110] Thietmar of Merseburg, *Chronicon*, Book 4, Chapter 13; Translation after Warner 2001, p. 160.

[111] Kajkowski 2014b, p. 136.

[112] Kajkowski 2014b, p. 137.

[113] See discussion in Kajkowski 2014b, p. 137.

[114] Adam of Bremen, *Gesta Hammaburgensis ecclesiae pontificum*, Book III, Chapter 50; Translation after Tschan 2003, p. 157.

[115] Kajkowski 2014b, p. 138.

[116] Gottschalk's death is also recounted in *Gesta Hammaburgensis ecclesiae pontificum* (Book III, Chapter 49) but apart from noting that he was killed by the Christians no further details are provided.

[117] On this passage, see also Wiszewski 2007, p. 67.

[118] *Ebbonis vita Ottonis*; Book III; Chapter 23; Translation by Robinson 1920, p. 177.

[119] Kajkowski 2014b, 139.

It is also possible that these grim events were one of the reasons why, in later times, the Slavs beheaded Christian clergy who came to preach the new faith among them. All such events and acts of revenge led to the constant escalation of conflict and violence.

Finally, it is worth pointing out an important event recorded in *Ebbonis vita Ottonis*, which describes an act of grave reopening which involved decapitation and the severing of limbs of the buried dead. This remarkable story was told by the Polish Duke Bolezlav (Polish Bolesław Krzywousty) to Bishop Otto during his visit. As we read in *Ebbonis vita Ottonis*:

> When the Duke heard of his coming [i.e. the coming of Bishop Otto] he met him with haste and with due reverence, and continued to treat him with every kindness, as was right, for before this time he had known him as a friend. When he learned the cause of his journey, he was astonished and said that people had ravaged his land and people with bestial cruelty and ferocity, and had even dragged parents from their tombs, and had cut off their heads, torn out their teeth and scattered their bones on the public roads, and it was a wonder that he (the bishop) was himself alive and had not been torn in pieces by them, as all who came thither in former times to proclaim Christ had incurred sentence of death, and one of these had recently suffered death by crucifixion.[120]

The textual evidence surveyed in this section shows that, in the early medieval period in Poland, decapitation was an honourable form of capital punishment which was usually performed upon knights, although some wealthy townsfolk could also be executed in this way. It should also be emphasised that there is nothing in the extant sources that would suggest that the act of beheading was intended as a preventive measure against revenants.

The situation is slightly different in the case of the Pomeranian Slavs, because among those people the act of decapitation sometimes had ritual undertones and does not seem to have been an honourable form of execution; as we have seen, on several occasions the heads of Christians trying to preach their faith among the pagans were cut off and sacrificed to the pagan gods. In light of this, it would perhaps be tempting to interpret the finds from Cedynia in Western Pomerania, where some of the heads were missing from the graves, as belonging to people who had been sacrificed. This interpretation seems unlikely, however, as the cemetery was connected to a stone church erected there in the thirteenth century.[121] It appears, therefore, that other meanings were attributed to the decapitation burials at Cedynia. Most likely they represented burials of convicts or reflected some other practices without any negative connotation.

5. DECAPITATED BURIALS IN LATE MEDIEVAL AND EARLY MODERN POLAND

After this overview and analysis of early medieval decapitated burials from Poland, let us briefly turn our attention to similar practices in later times. Material evidence for decapitation in the Late Middle Ages and early modern period is predominantly from execution sites, many of which have been excavated in recent years by the Stowarzyszenie Ochrony i Badań Zabytków Prawa (see Chapter 3). From the fourteenth century onwards, people killed by beheading were typically buried on the spot of their public execution and in close proximity to judicial architecture, such as the gallows or the so-called *Rabenstein*[122] (a kind of scene or platform built of stone). Examples of such burials, predominantly from the area of Silesia, are discussed in detail in the works of Daniel Wojtucki[123] and Paweł Duma,[124] and the observations below are largely based on their impressive studies.[125]

Textual accounts from different parts of Europe show that, in the Late Middle Ages and early modern times, decapitation was a punishment for various offences, including witchcraft, infanticide, theft, promiscuity and contact with the Devil.[126] There were various ways of performing this act of execution: for example, the convict could be in a kneeling position or seated on a chair or stool. Alternatively, the head of the criminal could be placed on a block.[127] Archaeological and textual sources demonstrate that after the execution, the severed heads were sometimes nailed to posts and that the bodies of convicts could be additionally pierced with stakes, covered with stones or buried in a prone position. A famous example of a skull pierced with a long nail is from Piotrków in Poland (**Fig. 5.31**). It was discovered in 1870, and although it is sometimes discussed in the

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[120] *Ebbonis vita Ottonis*; Book III; Chapter 13; Translation by Robinson 1920, pp. 145–146.

[121] Malinowska-Łazarczyk 1982(I), pp. 16–18.

[122] Wojtucki 2009, pp. 49–58.

[123] Wojtucki 2009, pp. 136–144.

[124] Duma 2015.

[125] But see also Obtułowicz, Pokutta 2014.

[126] Wojtucki 2009, pp. 137, 139–140.

[127] Wojtucki 2009, pp. 140–141.

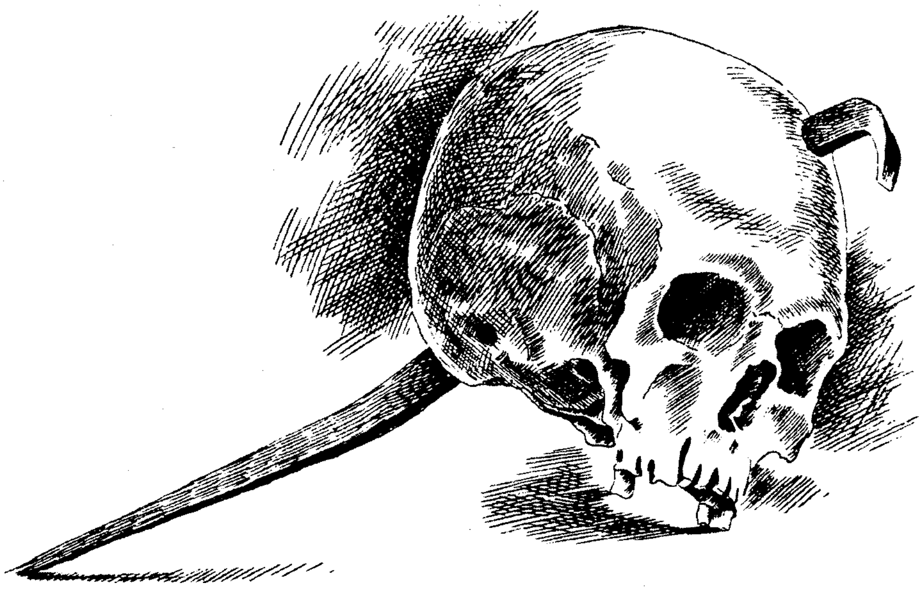

Fig. 5.31. Skull pierced with a nail from Piotrków, Poland. After Moszyński 1934, p. 663.

context of Slavic vampirism, this skull is a testimony to violent nineteenth-century judicial practices and has nothing to do with the fear of revenants.[128] Another skull of this kind was found in Brzeg Dolny in Poland in 1872, but examples of skulls pierced with nails have also been discovered in Germany, where there is evidence for the practice of nailing the heads of convicts to the gallows – remarkably, some of the nails could be as long as 50cm.[129] All these late medieval and early modern examples are similar in character to the early medieval evidence reviewed above, and show explicitly that in more recent historical periods the act of decapitation continued to coincide with other special practices, sometimes with an apotropaic meaning and at other times with the intention of even further condemning the criminal.

Based on extant textual sources and other relevant evidence (e.g. archaeology and iconography), it appears that in late medieval Poland decapitations were usually conducted with the use of a sword by a skilled professional executioner.[130] In contrast to stoning (which was a very rare practice in the Late Middle Ages in Poland), decapitation was regarded as an honourable form of death, but it was absolutely essential for the executioner to separate the head from the spine with a single blow. Doing so was not always easy, especially if the convict was heavily built, and there are recorded instances when the executioners failed (in archaeological material these failed attempts are indicated by cut marks on the clavicles, for example).[131] Interestingly, there are a number of written records of executioners who were punished for their poor performance. According to these sources, as well as being subjected to public ostracism, the executioner's salary could be decreased and sometimes they could even lose their job.[132]

Among the most remarkable finds of early modern decapitation burials from Poland are those from the execution site at Miłków in Silesia (**Fig. 5.32** and **Fig. 5.33**).[133] The site contained a circular gallows made of stone with three high pillars. According to textual sources, it was built in 1677 by Baron Carl Heinrich von Zierotin, and over the years served as a place for the execution of various kinds of criminals.[134] Extant records show that, in addition to hangings, beheadings were also conducted there. All this was also confirmed during archaeological excavations conducted at Miłków in 2007–2009 by the Stowarzyszenie Ochrony i Badań Zabytków Prawa. The most famous execution at Miłków took place on 14 October 1701. The convicts were members of the Exner family from Karpacz, who were sentenced to death for committing incest and

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[128] Moszyński 1934, p. 663; Stanaszek 2016a, p. 98.

[129] Duma, Wojtucki 2013, p. 286.

[130] On executioners' swords, their forms, usage and symbolic meanings see, for example, Maisel 1982, pp. 179–181; Wojtucki 2014, pp. 361–365.

[131] Wojtucki 2009, p. 136.

[132] Wojtucki 2009, pp. 140–142.

[133] Grenda, Paternoga, Rutka, Wojtucki 2007a; Grenda, Paternoga, Rutka, Wojtucki 2008; Wojtucki 2009; Duma 2010, pp. 94–103.

[134] Duma 2010, p. 94.

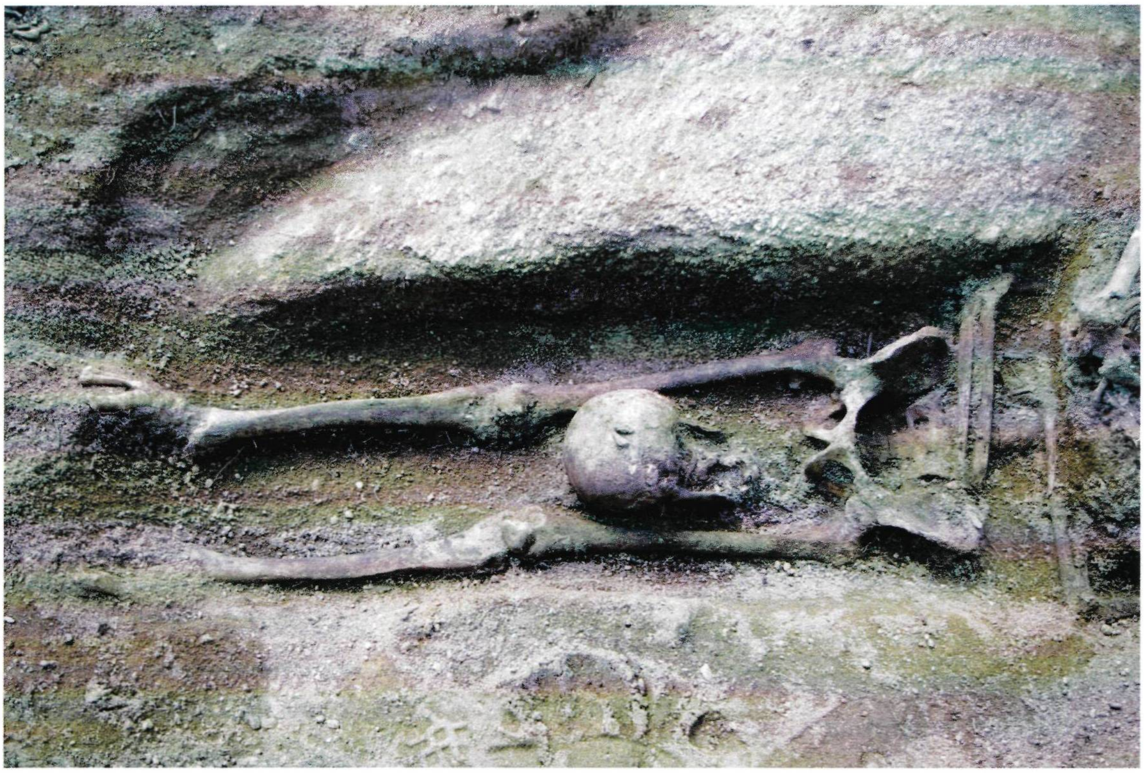

Fig. 5.32. Grave of a decapitated convict from Miłków buried with his head between the legs. Photo by Daniel Wojtucki. Used by kind permission.

infanticide.[135] The story goes that the brother and sister had a baby together, which soon after birth was killed by its grandmother and buried under the wall of her house. When the truth about their crime was revealed, the siblings and their grandmother were caught, executed by decapitation and buried at the gallows. The bodies of the parents of the murdered child were additionally pierced with stakes.[136] Remarkably, archaeological excavations at Miłków have revealed almost beyond a shadow of doubt the remains of the Exner family (as shown not only by their beheaded remains but also by the preserved traces of wooden stakes), along with several other graves of executed criminals.[137] The case of Miłków represents a unique example of how textual and archaeological sources can occasionally complement one another and illustrates the remarkable potential of using archival written accounts in interpretations of material evidence. Regrettably, this is not always possible with the early medieval finds that form the main subject of this book.

More examples of late medieval and early modern sites from Poland which include burials of decapitated individuals are discussed in the works of Paweł Duma and Daniel Wojtucki; interested readers are encouraged to refer to them for further details and discussions.[138]

6. COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVES

Having now extensively discussed the motif of the head and the practice of decapitation among the Slavs in Poland and Pomerania, we can turn to comparative evidence from the Viking world and Anglo-Saxon England. As we shall see below, there are some interesting conceptual parallels between the archaeological and textual sources from these different cultural milieus.

Decapitation and decapitated burials in the Viking world

Decapitation, as a form of execution or as a ritual practice, is mentioned in a relatively broad range of textual sources that refer to the Viking Age Scandinavians, both in their homelands and in various parts of their diaspora.[139] Most

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[135] Duma 2010, p. 95.

[136] Duma 2010, p. 95.

[137] Duma 2010, p. 101.

[138] Wojtucki 2009; 2014; Duma 2010; 2015.

[139] On decapitation in Old Norse sources and Germanic penal laws, see Ström 1942, pp. 142–171.

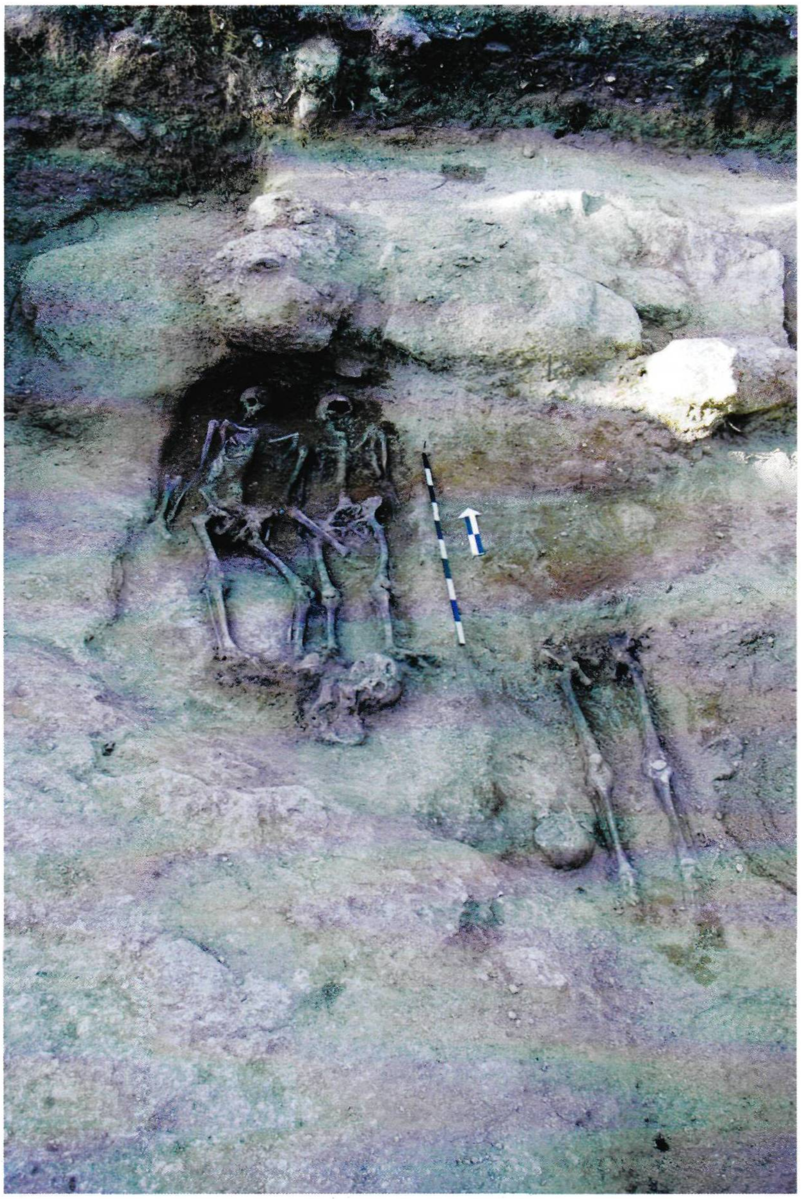

Fig. 5.33. Graves of convicts from Miłków. Photo by Daniel Wojtucki. Used by kind permission.

of these texts were the subject of a detailed study which I published in 2013,[140] so in the following sections I will provide an overview of the main results from my former research, without going into too much detail.

In Old Norse literature, descriptions of beheadings are found in various textual sources pertaining to the worlds of gods and humans. One of the most remarkable accounts that mentions an act of beheading is recorded in Snorri Sturluson's *Ynglinga saga* (part of the larger collection of sagas known as *Heimskringla*).[141] The fourth chapter of the saga describes a conflict between the two divine families, the Æsir and the Vanir. When the gods finally reach an agreement, they decide to exchange hostages. The Æsir receive two outstanding men, Njǫrðr and Freyr, while the Vanir receive Hœnir accompanied by Mímir, a very wise man. Hœnir is quickly made a chieftain, but constantly consults Mímir in all things. This soon becomes annoying because whenever Mímir is absent, he is unable to make up his mind and asks others to make decisions for him. As a result, convinced that the Æsir had cheated them, the Vanir decide to decapitate Mímir and his head is sent back to Ásgarðr, the abode of the Æsir gods. Upon seeing this, the god Óðinn takes the severed head, embalms it with herbs and chants songs over it. This animates the head and it soon becomes a valuable source of wisdom and counsel.

The motif of decapitation also appears in the well-known story of Sigurðr fáfnisbani, or Sigurd the

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[140] Gardeła 2013b with extensive references.

[141] Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson 1941–1951; Hollander 2002.

Dragonslayer, which is extant in several Old Norse accounts and other non-Scandinavian sources, and is also portrayed in Viking Age art.[142] As we read in the Eddic poem *Fáfnismál*, after having killed the dragon Fáfnir, Sigurðr roasts the beast's heart on a spit and burns his finger in the process. Having put the finger in his mouth to calm the pain, he accidentally tastes the dragon's blood and this gives him supernatural skills that enable him to understand the speech of birds. He soon learns from them that his former friend, a blacksmith called Regin, is planning to kill him and take possession of the dragon's treasure. Upon hearing this, Sigurðr decides to outwit Regin and kills him by cutting his head off (*Fáfnismál* 34). Interestingly, the decapitation of Regin is not only mentioned in textual sources but also represented in Viking Age art, for example on a famous stone from Ramsund in Södermanland, Sweden.

In Old Norse mythological and legendary sources, decapitation can also be an act of revenge, as shown in the Eddic poem *Vǫlundarkviða*, where Vǫlundr decapitates the sons of an evil king named Níðuðr.[143] Afterwards, he transforms the boys' skulls into drinking cups and chases their outside with silver. A similar motif is found in the Eddic poem *Atlamál in grœnlenzco* (79) where, again in an act of revenge, a woman named Guðrún gives her husband beer in cups made from the skulls of her own sons.[144]

An interesting example related to the head motif is recorded in *Jómsvíkinga saga* (7), where a woman named Ingebjǫrg Ottarsdóttir dreams of weaving on a loom.[145] Suddenly, one of the weights detaches from the warp, starts rolling, and transforms into the head of the Danish king Harald Bluetooth Gormsson. In the saga, this dream heralds the king's death. A similar motif, where loomweights are portrayed as cut off human heads, is also recorded in the poem known as *Darraðarljóð*, in which twelve supernatural females weave a macabre cloth, whose fabric is made of human entrails, on a loom made of spears and axes.[146] Speaking of women in the context of decapitation, it is also worth adding that in the account of the Arab emissary Ibn Fadlān a woman decapitates a hen as part of an elaborate funerary ceremony.[147]

Most important for our current discussion are textual examples of decapitations pertaining to dealings with the living dead. There are several Old Norse accounts which mention encounters with revenants that end with beheadings. Two of the most vivid instances are described in *Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar*, which tells the story of a famous outlaw named Grettir.[148] During one of his adventures, Grettir enters a mound of a man named Kárr the Old who after his death had transformed into a malevolent revenant and started haunting people in the neighbourhood. The saga provides a lot of details regarding the procedure of reopening his grave (presumably a chamber grave) and also meticulously describes its contents – it is said that Kárr was buried in a seated position on a carved chair and had a chest full of silver at his feet, as well as other precious items made of silver and gold. After entering the mound, Grettir attempts to remove all this treasure, but as soon as he tries to get out, the revenant grabs him and a fierce fight between the two ensues. Ultimately, the hero manages to pull out his sword and cut Kárr's head off, which leads to the annihilation of the revenant. In this way, peace is finally restored.

In another famous passage included in *Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar*, Grettir helps a local community to get rid of a particularly malevolent man named Glámr, who has turned into a revenant after his death.[149] Earlier in the saga, Glámr is described as a very peculiar individual, huge in size and with glaring grey eyes and wolf-grey hair. From the very beginning, he is disliked by the local community, and after an argument with the wife of the farmer who hired him as a shepherd, he leaves the house in anger and never returns. Soon, Glámr is found dead in the wilderness, his corpse bloated and bluish-gray in colour. Because his body is too heavy to be transported, the people who find him decide to cover him with stones. After a while, however, Glámr rises from the dead and this begins a whole series of disturbing events – the revenant is frequently seen wandering around the farm and causing fear among the local people. Soon, Glámr's mischief escalates to the point that he kills several people, and destroys everything in reach. When Grettir arrives at the farm and is told about these disturbing events, he decides to confront Glámr. One evening, when the revenant returns to the farm, Grettir engages in a fight with him. In the course of their struggle, Glámr casts an evil eye on Grettir, which initially confuses the hero and prevents him from drawing his sword, although in the end he does manage to do so. As in the case of the aforementioned encounter with Kárr, the fight ends with Grettir decapitating Glámr. Interestingly, he places the severed head of the revenant between his buttocks – perhaps this is done to signal contempt or represents a special kind of apotropaic act.[150]

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[142] Von See, La Farge, Gerhold, Picard, Schulz 2006; Kópar 2012; Gardeła 2013b, pp. 92–93 with further references.

[143] Gardeła 2013b, pp. 92–93. For a new English translation of the *Poetic Edda*, see Larrington 2014.

[144] Gardeła 2013b, pp. 93.

[145] Gardeła 2013b, p. 95. For an English translation of *Jómsvíkinga saga*, see Hollander 2000.

[146] Poole 1991, pp. 116–156; Price 2002, pp. 331–337, 384–388; Bek-Pedersen 2008; Gardeła 2013b, pp. 95–96.

[147] See discussion in Mongtomery 2000, pp. 17–18, who sees it as 'a way of communicating with the spirit world'; Gardeła 2013b, p. 139.

[148] Guðni Jónsson 1936.

[149] For a detailed discussion on this passage, see Gardeła 2013b, pp. 96–101.

Further examples of beheading the living dead are recounted in *Svarfdœla saga* and *Egils saga einhenda ok Ásmundar berserkjabana*.[151] In the latter case, the revenant is first decapitated and afterwards his body is burnt to ashes. Interestingly, the whole event takes place in an unusual location – not in the open air, but inside the burial mound.

One remarkable instance of a *post-mortem* beheading without apotropaic intent is recorded in a passage from *Eyrbyggja saga* (27).[152] It relates how a woman named Þorgerðr participates in the *post-mortem* decapitation of her murdered husband, Vigfus. In this case, the reason why the grave is reopened and Vigfus' head cut off is to provoke others to take action and avenge his death.[153]

This brief overview of Old Norse sources shows that the practice of decapitation appears in a broad range of contexts and was endowed with a multitude of meanings. It is associated with different kinds or beings, including gods, heroes, and supernatural characters. Generally, outside the sphere of mythology, textual accounts portray decapitation as a form of execution for captives or prisoners of war,[154] or as a form of dealing with revenants which ensures they will never return.[155] On occasion, we also see beheading as an act of revenge. Cases of animated or talking heads, possibly influenced by earlier Celtic traditions, are very special and rare in Old Norse literature, but do add a further intriguing dimension to the understanding of the role of the head among Scandinavian and Icelandic societies.[156] Likewise, of particular interest is the motif of using human heads as drinking vessels in two of the Eddic poems, *Vǫlundarkviða* and *Atlamál in grœnlenzko*. Although there is no archaeological evidence in Viking Age Scandinavia for the existence of this practice beyond the pages of medieval manuscripts, a curious find from Ribe – a human skull fragment with a runic inscription – may suggest that human body parts, including skulls, could have been used as amulets.[157] As I have argued in my earlier study, one reason why the head was assigned special significance among Norse societies may have been the shared Indo-European belief that it was the source of wisdom and vital strength of a person.[158]

Although there are numerous accounts of beheadings in Old Norse literature, when the motif of decapitation among the Norse societies is examined from an archaeological perspective, we see that it does not seem to have been a very frequently performed practice. In Viking archaeology, graves of beheaded individuals are often classified as examples of so-called 'deviant burials', but as has been shown recently, they may have various meanings, not all of them negative.[159]

Viking Age graves of decapitated individuals have been discovered in a number of localities, particularly Denmark, Sweden and England.[160] While it is not possible to discuss each of them in detail, we can nevertheless devote some attention to several of the most representative cases. We shall begin this overview with examples from Denmark, followed by a discussion of decapitated burials in Sweden and elsewhere in the Viking world.

Decapitated burials in Viking Age Denmark

Chamber grave FII from the cemetery at Stengade in Langeland is among the best-known examples of decapitated burials from Viking Age Scandinavia

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[150] Gardeła 2013b, p. 100.

[151] Ström 1942, p. 168; Hermann Pálsson, Edwards 1985, p. 20; Gardeła 2013b, p. 96.

[152] Einar Ól. Sveinsson, Matthias Þórðarson 1935; Gardeła 2013b, p. 102.

[153] It is also worth mentioning that later in the same saga (*Eyrbyggja saga* 43), one of the characters encounters a severed head that utters prophetic verses. See Gardeła 2013b, pp. 102–103.

[154] See examples in *Harðar saga*, *Jómsvíkinga saga* and *Orkneyinga saga*.

[155] See examples in *Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar*, *Svarfdœla saga*, *Áns saga bogsveigis*. See also discussions in Ellis 1943; Chadwick 1946.

[156] For cross-cultural parallels, see Armit 2012 and Egeler 2013, pp. 87–89.

[157] Jensen 1991, p. 51.

[158] Gardeła 2013b, p. 105.

[159] Gardeła 2013b; 2013c.

[160] See examples in Brøndsted 1936; Sellevold, Hansen, Jørgensen 1984; Skaarup 1972; 1976; Grøn, Krag, Bennike 1994; Thäte 2007; Eriksen, Egeberg, Helles Olesen, Rostholm 2009.

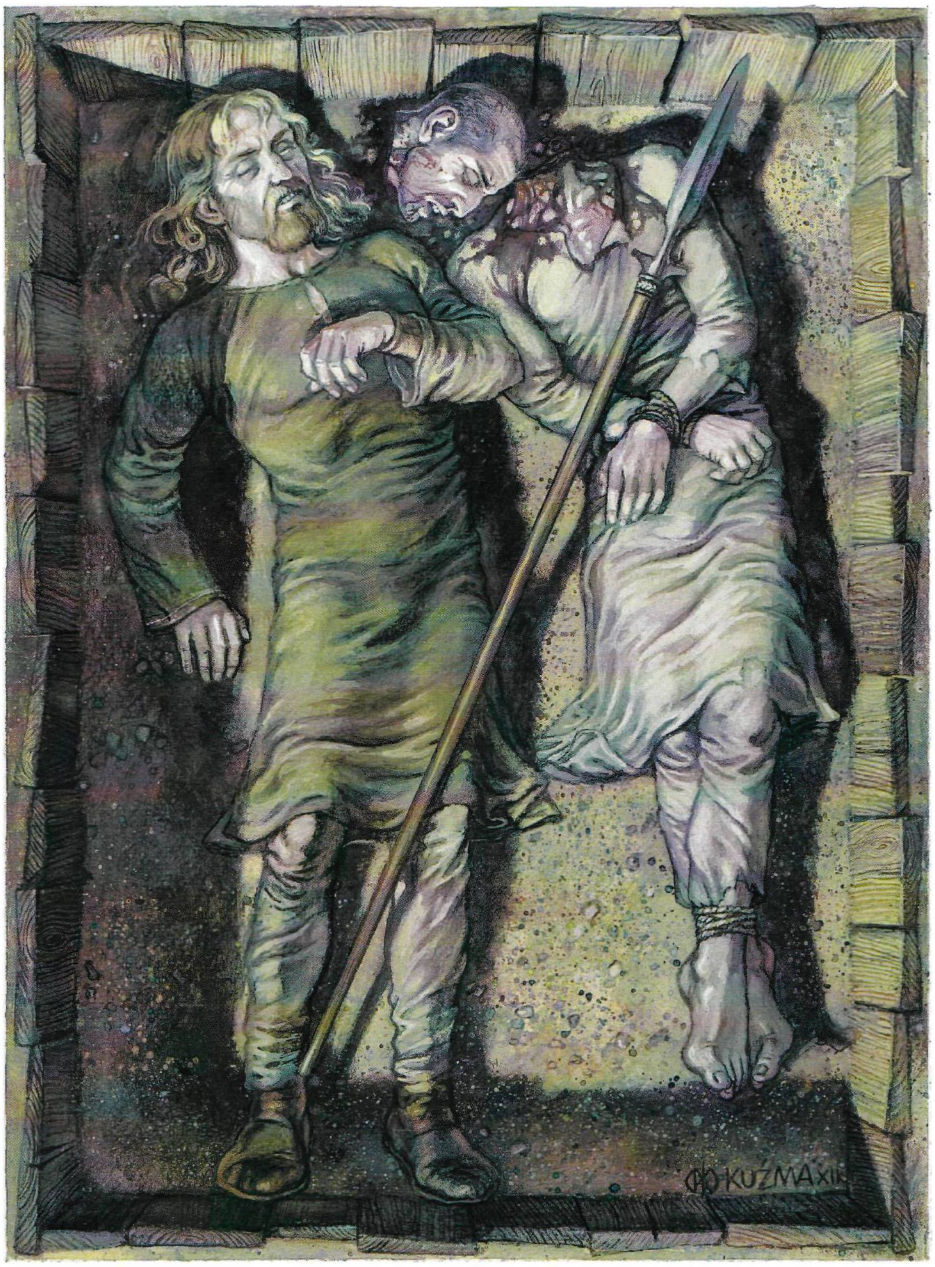

Fig. 5.34. Reconstruction of grave FII from Stengade, Langeland, Denmark. Illustration by Mirosław Kuźma. Copyright by Leszek Gardeła and Mirosław Kuźma.

(**Fig. 5.34**).[161] It contained two male individuals buried side by side in supine position. The individual in the southern part of the grave died at around the age of 25, while the man in the northern part of the grave was between 30–35 years old at death. This older man merits particular attention – his head had been severed from the spine and, upon excavation, was found lying in the grave above his right clavicle. The position of the man's arms and legs implies that they were tied, probably with a rope (but none of it has survived). Another striking aspect of this grave is that it contained a spearhead whose shaft must originally have been placed diagonally in the grave, directly on top of the two deceased men. Interestingly, this spear belongs to the so-called 'winged type' and its socket is lavishly decorated with silver inlay.[162] It is unclear whether it represents a personal possession and/or a status symbol of one of the buried individuals, or whether it played some other role during the funerary ceremony. One possibility, which I have already suggested in one of my previous works, is that it may have been used as a ritual tool in funerary practices associated with the god Óðinn, which involved marking the dying (or the dead) with the tip of a spear. Through this ceremony, the dead would be dedicated specifically to this god.[163] Based on anthropological analyses, it seems that the younger individual buried in grave FII at Stengade may have been of some importance. This is indicated by his exceptional height (193cm), which could have resulted from good living conditions and rich diet. This grave is typically interpreted as belonging to a master and slave who was killed to accompany him in the afterlife.[164] Interestingly, it represents the only example of a chamber grave containing a decapitated individual – to the best of my knowledge, no other graves of this type have preserved traces of such a practice.

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[161] Skaarup 1972; 1976, pp. 56–59; Sellevold, Hansen, Jørgensen 1984, p. 116; Gardeła 2013b, pp. 108–110.

[162] On winged spears and their significance in the Viking Age see, for example, Kurasiński 2005; Pedersen 2014, pp. 89–95; Hjardar, Vike 2016, pp. 175–180.

In Chapter 4, I mentioned the double grave 55 from Lejre, where one of the two deceased individuals had his head cut off.[165] Similar to grave FII at Stengade, this grave has also been interpreted as that of a master and his slave. It is worth mentioning that the decapitated man also had his limbs tied and was buried in a prone position. A similar instance to that from Lejre was discovered in another Danish cemetery at Kumle Høje in Langeland, where a grave with two superimposed men was found (grave F).[166] The man at the bottom of the grave had been laid on his back while the 'upper' individual had been interred in a prone position. In contrast to grave 55 from Lejre, here the heads of both men had been cut off. Unfortunately, the available information about this grave is very vague, which significantly hampers its interpretation today.

Speaking of decapitation burials in Viking Age Denmark, it is also vital to mention grave T from the cemetery at Bogøvej in Langeland (**Fig. 5.35**).[167] This puzzling grave belonged to an adult woman, roughly 30–40 years old at the moment of death, who was buried in a wooden coffin in a supine position. When the grave was discovered, the woman's skull lay between her thighs alongside a broken jaw, a cervical vertebrae and a shell. Her hands were resting on her pelvis and on the woman's right arm was an iron knife. Additionally, her grave contained two glass beads, probably from a necklace – one was found near the collarbone and the other in the western part of the coffin, along with four fragments of a broken cervical vertebrae. The position of the woman's skull between her legs is startling, especially given that her hands were found resting on her pelvis, which gives the impression that she may have been buried without the performance of any 'deviant acts'. It is possible that

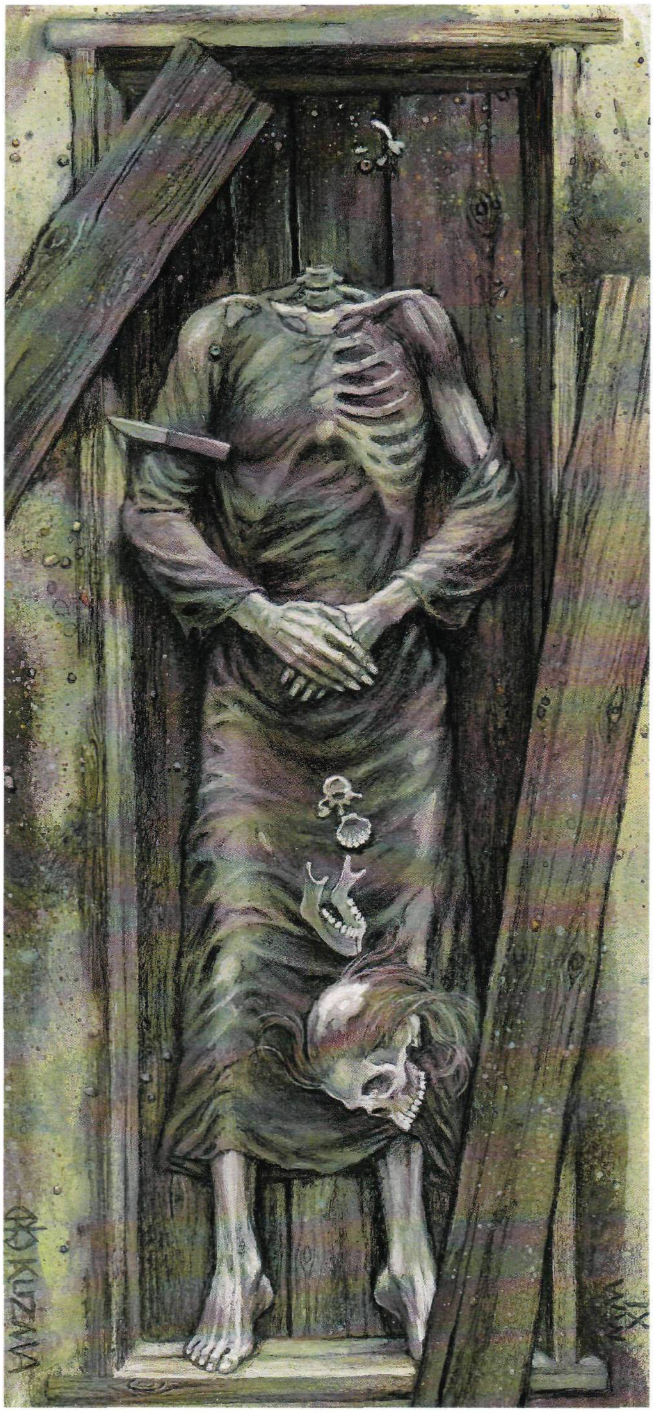

Fig. 5.35. Reconstruction of grave T from Bogøvej, Langeland, Denmark. Illustration by Mirosław Kuźma. Copyright by Leszek Gardeła and Mirosław Kuźma.

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[163] Gardeła 2013b, p. 109.

[164] Gardeła 2013b, p. 110.

[165] For a detailed discussion on this grave, see Gardeła 2013b, pp. 111–113.

[166] Thäte 2007, p. 268; Gardeła 2013b, p. 113.

[167] Grøn, Krag, Bennike 1994, pp. 17–19; Gardeła 2013b, pp. 123–127.

the gruesome appearance of this grave upon excavation was only the result of taphonomic processes which caused the head to detach from the spine and roll down the coffin towards the foot end. Such a course of events is likely, especially if an individual is buried in a closed container. After backfilling such a grave, the empty space can fill up with groundwater or can be broken into by animals, all of which can cause considerable damage to the decomposing human remains and disarticulate them. However, if natural post-depositional factors did not lead to the detachment of the woman's head in grave T at Bogøvej, there are two alternative scenarios. The first is that she was decapitated (perhaps during an execution) before interment, and that her head was placed in the coffin in the course of funerary procedures. I have mentioned above that the hands resting on the pelvis could suggest a rather peaceful burial, but if we accept that the decapitation was an intentional act, the position of the hands could perhaps imply that they were tied. In general, the placing of hands of the deceased on the pelvis is a rare occurrence in Viking Age graves in Denmark, which further substantiates this hypothesis. This idea is also supported by the aforementioned examples of decapitation burials from Lejre (grave 55), Stengade (grave FII), and other sites where the deceased had their limbs tied. The alternative interpretation of grave T from Bogøvej is that the woman was not decapitated before placing her body in the coffin, but that the removal of her head was done intentionally sometime after her soft tissues had decomposed by reopening the grave. While there are no indications of any intentional disturbance of this grave, this possibility cannot be ruled out. The fact that no cut marks have been found on the woman's vertebrae implies that her head could have been pulled off from the spine rather than being cut off with a sharp instrument.

Finally, it is worth mentioning a very peculiar find that was made several years ago during the archaeological excavations at Rosengade 17–19 at Aarhus, Denmark.[168] A well dated to the tenth century was found to contain the severed skull of a man with cut marks made by a sword or axe. It has been suggested that the skull may have been a victor's trophy or evidence of premeditated murder.

Based on this survey of archaeological evidence for decapitation burials in Viking Age Denmark, it appears that most of them can be associated with human sacrifice or the death penalty (or both at the same time). This manner of treating the dead, although violent to our eyes today, was certainly deliberate and was intended to convey a particular message to those present at the graveside. Although each of the graves is essentially different, the pattern that emerges when we look collectively at the instances from Lejre, Stengade, Kumle Høje, and perhaps also from Bogøvej, is that people buried with severed heads also had their limbs tied. When viewed contextually, the tying of limbs in connection with the act of decapitation is not unusual, since it was performed in other cultural milieus around the same time, for example among the Slavs or Anglo-Saxons. In fact, the same is done today, with the same purpose, among some radical groups. The reason for binding the hands is purely practical – it serves to prevent the convict from parrying the blow of a sword or axe. In the case of the Danish graves, the bound hands of decapitated individuals are a clear indication that the act of beheading was indeed an execution, and that the head was not cut off during combat or as the result of some unfortunate accident.

Decapitated burials in Viking Age Sweden

Several examples of decapitated burials are known from Viking Age Sweden, mainly from Skåne and Uppland. The problem with many of them, however, is that they have been published in a very laconic manner and without photographs or drawings, making their interpretation extremely difficult. Nevertheless, as in the case of Denmark, the available evidence shows clearly that in Viking Age Sweden decapitation victims were predominantly men, although one example of a possibly decapitated female has been found at Birka (grave Bj 959). In Sweden, the decapitated individuals were buried either singly or in double graves, and in the latter case the dead were laid side by side or superimposed. Below, we shall review a few of the most representative examples.[169]

Grave 3 from the Viking Age cemetery at Fjälkinge in Skåne appears to have been similar to the aforementioned graves 55 from Lejre and FII from Stengade, in the sense that it also held two superimposed individuals, with the 'upper' one decapitated. According to Fredrik Svanberg, the skull of the beheaded individual was placed by the pelvis (it is unspecified where and how exactly) and the lower bones and feet were cut off.[170] This instance is particularly interesting if we consider it in the context of the passage from *Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar* discussed above, in which Grettir places the decapitated head of the revenant Glámr between his legs. Another archaeological parallel has been found in a Viking Age cemetery at Ljungbacka (grave 23).[171] Placing the severed head in the pelvic area or between the legs is a very rare practice in Viking Age Scandinavia, and there are strong indications that it could have signalled contempt and represented a kind of defamatory burial. It is not unlikely that it also reflects a fear of revenants.

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[168] Skov 2011.

[169] For a more thorough discussion, see Gardeła 2013b, pp. 115–123.

Although among the Viking Age Scandinavians, execution by beheading seems to have been a punishment usually reserved for men, one grave (Bj 959) discovered in the cemetery at Birka appears to have belonged to a decapitated female (**Fig. 5.36** and **Fig. 5.37**).[172] The woman was buried in a relatively large grave pit, whose size was reminiscent of a chamber grave, although no wooden lining of its walls was recorded upon excavation. Her body was aligned SW-NE and her legs were slightly flexed. Based on the grave goods that accompanied her, it seems that the woman was very well dressed and wore an apron over her dress. The apron was held by two oval brooches (Jan Petersen's type P55: 1A) and between them was a string of glass beads and a small bronze pendant with spiral ends. At the woman's waist were iron shears and a needlecase, as well as an iron knife – all these items may have originally been suspended from one of the oval brooches. The original drawing of this grave, made by its excavator Hjalmar Stolpe, shows the woman's head as being detached from the spine and lying on the right forearm. The immediate impression one gets from this is that she was decapitated, but it is possible that the head disconnected from the spine as a result of natural post-depositional processes or grave disturbance. One strong indication that the head was intentionally cut off is that her severed skull was missing the lower jaw; instead, the mandible of a pig was lying on the woman's spine. Could it be that whoever was responsible for this burial tried to substitute the woman's missing body part for that of an animal? And if so, what did that mean? The answers to these questions are difficult to provide; we may only speculate that the alleged decapitation of the woman and the removal of her jaw was intended to prevent her from speaking (uttering curses, perhaps?). This curious grave is the only example of a decapitated female at Birka, and the only known case from Viking Age Sweden.

Concluding our overview of Swedish decapitation burials, it is worth noting that, as in the case of Poland, there are several instances where heads seem to have been buried singly and without any trace of the postcranial skeletons. It is quite likely, however, that some of these findings do not represent intentional funerary acts, but are instead the result of post-depositional processes of bone decomposition or grave disturbance. Examples of such graves have been found at Fjälkinge (Villand hundred, Fjälkinge parish, Skåne),[173] Raga Hörstad (Rönneberga hundred, Asmundtorp parish, Skåne)[174] and Stavie (Torna hundred, Stavie parish, Skåne). Regrettably, many of them have been published in a way that does not permit detailed analysis and interpretation.

Decapitated burials in England and the Isle of Man

In 2009, a remarkable discovery was made at Ridgeway Hill near Weymouth in England – a mass grave of over fifty executed and decapitated males.[175] Isotope analyses have revealed that the men came to England from several different places in Scandinavia. Given their relatively young age, it is possible that for some of them this was their first raid, a raid which was to have a very dramatic ending. The decapitated skulls, 51 in total, were deposited away from the bodies, heaped up in one part of the burial pit. Because no traces of textiles have been identified among the skeletal remains, it is possible that the men were thrown naked into the pit, probably shortly after a very violent execution.

An interesting but isolated case that relates to the motif of beheading but is not a classic example of decapitation *per se* is that of a woman buried at Ballateare in the Isle of Man.[176] Her skeletal remains were found in the upper layers of a burial mound that covered a very complex inhumation grave of a man who had been buried with a wide range of weapons and animal sacrifices. The woman's arms were raised

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[170] Svanberg 2003, p. 301.

[171] Thäte 2007, p. 267.

[172] Price 2002, p. 206; Kalmring 2010, pp. 286–287; Gardeła 2013b, pp. 119–123; 2016d, p. 49.

[173] Svanberg 2003, p. 305; Gardeła 2013b, pp. 117–118.

[174] Svanberg 2003, p. 282; Gardeła 2013b, p. 118.

[175] Score 2010; Loe, Boyle, Webb, Score 2014.

[176] Bersu, Wilson 1966, pp. 45–62; Jesch 1991, p. 25; Price 2008b, p. 266; Wilson 2008, pp. 28–36; Hall 2010, pp. 57–58; Griffiths 2010, pp. 81–83; Gardeła 2013b, pp. 127–128.

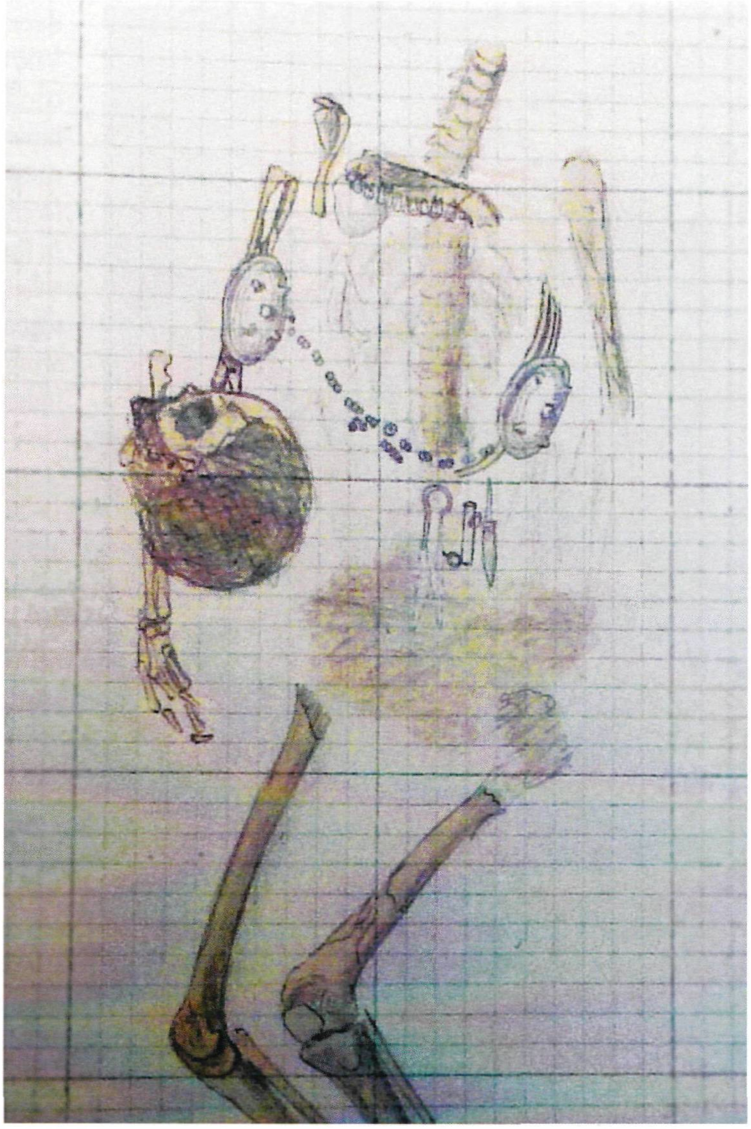

Fig. 5.36. Original drawing of grave Bj 959 from Birka, Uppland, Sweden. Illustration by Hjalmar Stolpe. Reproduced from Birkaportalen.

and part of her cranium had been slashed off (perhaps with a sword), probably in the course of the dramatic funerary ceremony. It has been argued that the woman may have been ritually killed to accompany her master on his journey to the afterlife.

Summarising decapitated burials in the Viking world

Based on the above observations, it is clear that in the Viking world decapitation was mainly performed on men, although two isolated examples of (likely) beheaded females are also noted in the archaeological record (Bogøvej T and Birka Bj 959). Decapitated individuals are typically buried in single or double graves, the latter displaying some variation (e.g. with regard to their internal and external construction), but also some similarities (e.g. the binding of limbs). In the double graves, the dead are either buried side by side or superimposed (e.g. grave FII from Stengade and grave 55 from Lejre respectively). In most instances, the bodies are interred in a supine position, although examples of prone burials coinciding with decapitation have also been recorded (e.g. grave 55 from Lejre and grave F from Kumle Høje). It is worth pointing out that, in a few cases, the severed head was placed in the leg area or at the pelvis (grave T from Bogøvej, grave 3 from Fjälkinge, grave 23 from Ljungbacka), a practice that has a textual parallel in *Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar* and which, as we have seen, is also well known from Slavic archaeology and later folklore. As in the case of Poland, most of the graves of decapitated individuals are poorly furnished: only in grave Bj 959 at Birka was the deceased buried with a wide array of objects.

We may conclude this section with the observation that, although there are some overlaps between textual sources and funerary materials from the Viking Age, it

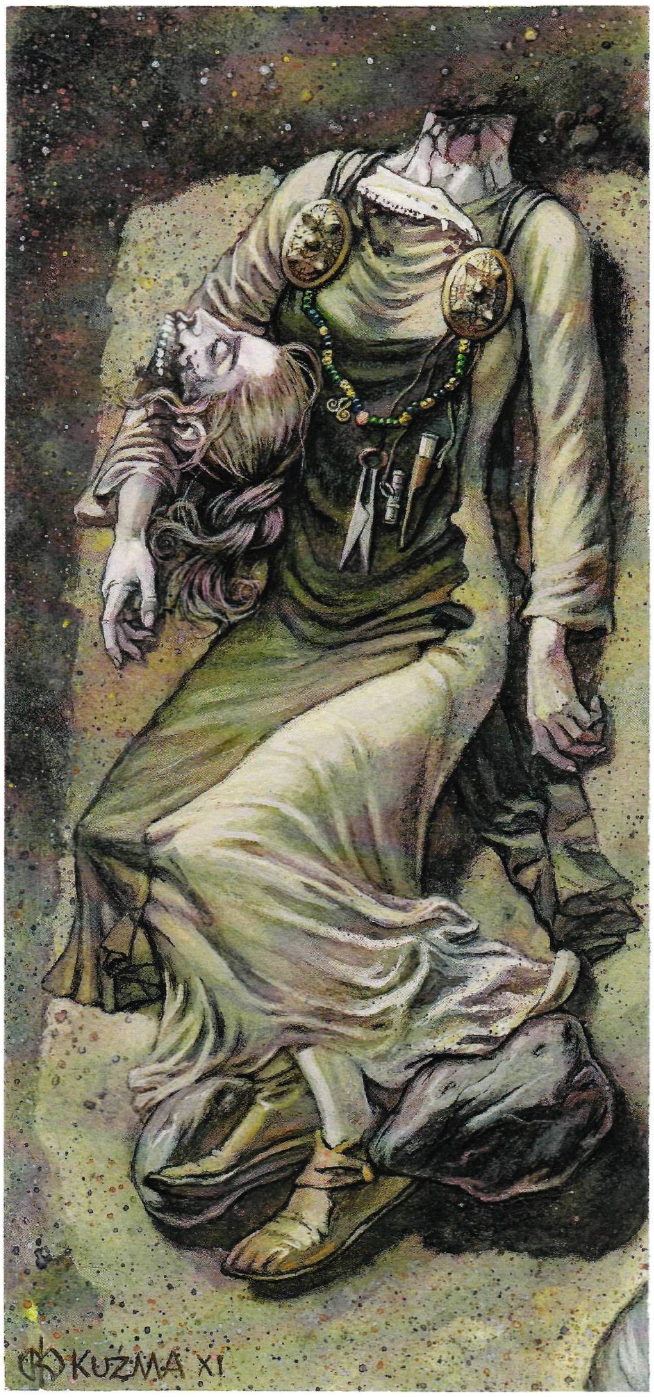

Fig. 5.37. Reconstruction of grave Bj 959 from Birka, Uppland, Sweden. Illustration by Mirosław Kuźma. Copyright by Leszek Gardeła and Mirosław Kuźma.

is not always easy or methodologically justified to use literary accounts in archaeological interpretations. Old Norse sagas show that decapitation among the Viking Age Scandinavians was imbued with numerous meanings and had various applications in both secular and ritual contexts – it is portrayed as an act of execution of captives or convicts, or as a way of annihilating malevolent revenants. Archaeological examples of decapitated burials seem to suggest that among the Viking Age Scandinavians, beheadings were mainly conducted as a death penalty and may on some occasions have been part of sacrificial rituals. As we have seen, they are typically interpreted as reflecting the desire to provide masters with slaves who would serve them in the afterlife. One problem with this hypothesis is that a headless slave would hardly have been useful. This forces us to look for other more plausible explanations, which, due to a lack of textual sources that could shed light on this curious phenomenon, are unfortunately very difficult to provide. It could be that these cases actually represent defamatory burials of criminals.

Based on the evidence that we have at hand, it is also very difficult to point to archaeological examples of decapitation burials that might signal an attempt to annihilate or immobilise a revenant. In my view, only the two female decapitation burials from Birka (Bj 959) and Bogøvej (T) could possibly belong to people who were feared of becoming living dead.[177] What we do not know for sure, however, is whether in these cases the act of beheading occurred before the bodies were committed to the ground or after the grave was reopened. There is also nothing in the field documentation that could help us find answers to these questions. In light of Old Norse textual sources, it seems that in order to convincingly argue that a Viking Age decapitation burial belonged to a revenant, we would have to find a grave that is both reopened and contains the remains of a single, beheaded individual. So far, no such examples have been found or identified in the archaeological record.

Decapitated burials in Anglo-Saxon England

As Andrew Reynolds observes, in the case of Anglo-Saxon England, 'decapitation is perhaps the least ambiguous of all the indicators of deviant burial where confident identification can be achieved'.[178] Nevertheless, he rightly recognises the same problems that pertain to decapitation burials in the Slavic world and in Viking Age Scandinavia – namely that they are often difficult to interpret due to the questionable reliability of older excavation reports, and that some of the assumed examples of decapitation could actually result from truncation or grave disturbance.[179]

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[177] Gardeła 2013b, p. 132.

[178] Reynolds 2009, p. 76.

[179] Reynolds 2009, p. 76.

Early Anglo-Saxon decapitation burials are evenly distributed in eastern, midland and south-central England: there are no traces of evident clusters.[180] In his study, Reynolds has identified fifty-four possible examples of decapitation from thirty-two cemeteries and has shown that, as in the case of early medieval Poland and Scandinavia, there are more examples of beheaded men than women. Over half of the graves were unfurnished and the rest had very modest furnishings. Interestingly, some of the graves included military equipment (e.g. spears and shield bosses) or jewellery.[181]

It appears that, in Anglo-Saxon England, the preferred instrument used for beheading was a sword. The heads of the decapitated individuals were buried in various ways and in various relations to the rest of the body. Reynolds discusses examples of early Anglo-Saxon graves where the head/skull was placed by the hip (grave 175 at Sleaford, Lincolnshire) or between the legs (graves 9 and 10 at Chadlington, Oxfordshire).[182] An interesting case is that of grave 78 from Linton Heath, Cambridgeshire, where an urn was deposited in place of the missing head[183] – this curious practice resembles some of the aforementioned graves discovered at Cedynia where stones often substituted for the missing heads of the deceased. Replacement of the skull has also been recorded at Great Addington in Northamptonshire.[184] Another similarity to the graves from Cedynia is displayed by grave 138 from Bidford-on-Avon, Warwickshire, where the skull of a woman was surrounded by limestone slabs forming a kind of 'box'.[185] All these peculiar instances are highly unlikely to have resulted from post-depositional processes – they represent premeditated and intentional burial acts.

In Andrew Reynolds' opinion, the fear of revenants seems to have been the main motivation to decapitate people in Early Anglo-Saxon England, although he does not exclude the possibility that beheading was a form of punishment for certain offences. In the latter case, however, it still seems that the act of severing the head would have had a superstitious undercurrent.[186] He concludes by saying that:

> (...) it would appear that the ideology of pre- and post-mortem decapitation is identical, but that the circumstances are entirely different, with beheading as the cause of death being undertaken for widely recognized social offences and post-mortem decapitation being undertaken by the family or their agents, either as a response to internal family disputes or as a community requirement.[187]

Decapitation was still performed after the conversion of the Anglo-Saxons to Christianity, when some of the previous meanings attributed to this practice may have undergone considerable changes. The significance of decapitation also changed because of the emergence of public execution sites, where it was conducted as a form of the death penalty, probably in the presence of a crowd of spectators.

Fourteen execution sites in Late Anglo-Saxon England have produced evidence for decapitation, with ninety-nine possible examples of this practice in total. Most of the beheaded individuals are male, but nine possible examples of female decapitations have also been recorded.[188] There are several indicators of decapitation in the Late Anglo-Saxon archaeological record, including instances where the head is in an unnatural position, where cut marks are present on the skull and/or cervical vertebrae, and where the skull is either missing or rotated to an extent that suggests its detachment from the spine prior to interment.[189] Interestingly, in a number of cases the head was found in the upper leg area (on the left or the right side), between the thighs and at the feet. One example is recorded in which the head was placed on the chest, and two with the head on the right arm.[190] As shown above, this manner of burial is also known from early medieval Poland and Scandinavia.

It can be inferred from Reynolds' analysis that decapitation burials only rarely coincided with other atypical practices. There are, however, instances of tied hands (behind the back and at the front). This was probably done to facilitate execution and prevent the convict from parrying the fatal blow – yet again we see parallels with Viking Age Scandinavia (e.g. grave 55 at Lejre and grave FII at Stengade) and Poland. One interesting phenomenon that has been observed at several Late Anglo-Saxon sites are graves with missing skulls or skulls that display traces of weathering or damage. Reynolds interprets these findings as indicating that the skulls had been attached to stakes and displayed on the surface of the cemetery (so-called *heafod stoccan*).[191] He also argues that the finds of skulls without mandibles could imply that they were displayed outside the grave for some time. I have suggested earlier above that the missing heads from a number of graves at Cedynia and Wolin Wzgórze Wisielców could have been attached to posts and displayed as a warning for criminals. I have also considered this possibility in the case of other finds that date from the Late Middle Ages and early modern times. This idea now finds even further support in light of this comparative evidence.

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[180] Reynolds 2009, p. 81.

[181] Reynolds 2009, pp. 78–79.

[182] Reynolds 2009, p. 77.

[183] Reynolds 2009, p. 78.

[184] Reynolds 2009, p. 80.

[185] Reynolds 2009, p. 80.

[186] Reynolds 2009, p. 91.

[187] Reynolds 2009, p. 92.

[188] Reynolds 2009, p. 168.

[189] Reynolds 2009, p. 166.

[190] Reynolds 2009, p. 168.

To conclude this discussion of the motif of beheading in Anglo-Saxon England, it is worth citing a tale preserved in Geoffrey of Burton's *Life and Miracles of St Modwenna*, which dates to the first half of the twelfth century. It describes how a local community dealt with two revenants who were sowing terror by walking through the village lanes and fields with their coffins on their shoulders, banging and shouting. These distressing events affected the local community so profoundly that they were soon struck with a disease. After receiving the bishop's permission to reopen the revenants' graves, the villagers:

> (...) cut off their heads and placed them in the graves between their legs, tore out their hearts from their corpses and covered the bodies with earth again (...) Soon after this was done both the disease and the phantoms ceased.[192]

As we have seen from comparative evidence from the Slavic areas and Scandinavia, this motif of grave disturbance and *post-mortem* beheading was widely known in medieval Europe, and it is indeed possible that *some* of the decapitation burials from Anglo-Saxon England were those of people whom the local communities feared of becoming revenants. However, as the materials surveyed above demonstrate, especially in the Late Anglo-Saxon period, the practice of beheading had judicial connotations, in particular as a punishment for theft, as indicated by the laws of Edgar and Æthelred.[193] The severing of the head was a visually dramatic and memorable form of punishment, and its subsequent display served as a warning against committing crimes.

7. CONCLUSIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH ON DECAPITATED BURIALS IN EARLY MEDIEVAL POLAND

After this detailed overview of the motif of the head and the practice of decapitation among the Slavs, the Scandinavians and the Anglo-Saxons, we see that in roughly the same period of time - that is, between the late tenth and thirteenth centuries - formally similar mortuary practices acquired a whole plethora of meanings across Europe.

Setting the Slavic material into a broad cross-cultural context demonstrates the fallacy of previous one-sided interpretations, which classify decapitated burials as those of revenants. A careful study of the archaeological evidence, supported by textual accounts from both the Slavic lands and from other areas of Europe, has shown that the bulk of them more than likely represent burials of executed criminals. With regard to Poland, this (re)interpretation, in my view, can be applied especially to the cases from Cedynia, Wolin and Sowinki but also to the cases from Kałdus and perhaps from Sandomierz. Interpreting the finds from Niemcza, Milicz, Płock-Podolszyce is more difficult, due to the problematic quality of the published data. I am not convinced if any of these graves can be regarded as those of revenants, although cases where decapitation coincides with prone burial and/or the tying of limbs, or where the head is placed at the feet, could possibly be interpreted in this way.

Ultimately, in interpreting decapitation burials as belonging to criminals or revenants, or as having some other meaning, we should always pay attention to even the smallest details of their internal and external structures and contents. Nor should we remain silent when the data that we work with is insufficient or problematic - we have to be open about this in newer publications. This has rarely been acknowledged in studies published so far - very often important issues of source criticism have either been omitted from discussions or simply ignored. This has led many scholars to draw immediate and impressionistic conclusions about the widespread fear of revenants or vampires in early medieval Poland. A more careful approach to the sources shows that the act of beheading among the Slavs was both diverse and multivalent, and that many past interpretations of decapitated burials were based on nothing more than wishful thinking and Hollywood-inspired approaches to medieval sources and material evidence.

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[191] Reynolds 2009, p. 169.

[192] Reynolds 2009, p. 92.

[193] Reynolds 2009, p. 169.

Table 2. Decapitation burials from Early Medieval Poland. The asterisk (*) marks graves which are problematic and where decapitation is uncertain

No.	Site	Grave number	Sex	Age	Orientation	Grave goods	References	Comments
1.	Cedynia (site 2), West Pomeranian Voivodeship	60	?	?	NE-SW	A ring made of thick bronze tape. The outer side of the ring bears an inscription: HANUT + HUNUT	Malinowska-Łazarczyk 1982(II), p. 19; Porzeziński 2008, pp. 23, 27; Gardeła 2011b, p. 176	-
2.	Cedynia (site 2a), West Pomeranian Voivodeship	76	?	Adult	NE-SW	None	Żydok 2004, p. 46; Porzeziński 2006, p. 341; Gardeła 2012a, pp. 30–32	The individual was buried in a prone position, possibly with the legs tied
3.	Cedynia (site 2), West Pomeranian Voivodeship	146	M	19–36	ES-WN	None	Malinowska-Łazarczyk 1982(II), p. 38; Porzeziński 2008, pp. 16, 23, 29; Wrzesiński 2008b, p. 152; Gardeła 2011b, pp. 176, 178	Three stones substitute for the head. The dislocated head was placed at the feet. It is possible, however, that the dislocated head at the feet could belong to another individual
4.	Cedynia (site 2), West Pomeranian Voivodeship	186	M	?	N-S	None	Malinowska-Łazarczyk 1982(II), p. 47; Porzeziński 2008, pp. 16, 23, 29; Wrzesiński 2008b, p. 152; Gardeła 2011b, p. 176	The decapitated skull lay face down and the body was additionally covered with stones
5.	Cedynia (site 2), West Pomeranian Voivodeship	196	?	?	E-W	None	Malinowska-Łazarczyk 1982(II), p. 49; Porzeziński 2008, pp. 23, 30; Gardeła 2011b, p. 176	-
6.	Cedynia (site 2)*, West Pomeranian Voivodeship	215	F	19–36	NE-SW(?)	Temple ring made of bronze	Malinowska-Łazarczyk 1982(II), p. 54; Porzeziński 2008, pp. 17, 23, 30; Gardeła 2011c, p. 176	-
7.	Cedynia (site 2), West Pomeranian Voivodeship	530	M	?	S-N	None	Malinowska-Łazarczyk 1982(II), p. 123; Porzeziński 2008, pp. 23, 31; Gardeła 2011b, p. 177	-
8.	Cedynia (site 2)*, West Pomeranian Voivodeship	552	?	?	W-E	A leather band with 15 fittings made of bronze foil, a round belt buckle made of bronze	Malinowska-Łazarczyk 1982(II), p. 130; Porzeziński 2008, pp. 23, 32; Gardeła 2011b, p. 177	The individual was interred in a coffin
9.	Cedynia (site 2), West Pomeranian Voivodeship	789	F	35–40	NE-SW	None	Porzeziński 2008, pp. 16, 23, 34	-

No.	Site	Grave number	Sex	Age	Orientation	Grave goods	References	Comments
10.	Cedynia (site 2), West Pomeranian Voivodeship	841	M	20–25	NE-SW	None	Porzeziński 2008, pp. 17	The position of the upper and lower extremities suggests that the individual may have been tied
11.	Cedynia (site 2), West Pomeranian Voivodeship	888	M	Over 60	NE-SW	None	Porzeziński 2008, pp. 23, 35; Gardeła 2011b, p. 177	-
12.	Cedynia (site 2), West Pomeranian Voivodeship	910	M	20–25	E-W	None	Porzeziński 2008, pp. 17, 23	-
13.	Kałdus (site 1), Kuyavian-Pomeranian Voivodeship	24/57	M	?	SEE-NWW	None	Kaszewska 1960; Stawska 2006b, p. 329; Kajkowski 2013, pp. 165–166	The skull lay 14 cm away from the last cervical vertebrae. The right leg had a healed fracture
14.	Kałdus (site 4), Kuyavian-Pomeranian Voivodeship	256/01	M+F	*Maturus*+ *Maturus*	SE-NW	None	Bojarski, Chudziak, Drozd, Koperkiewicz, Kozłowski, Stawska 2010, pp. 523–524; Kozłowski 2010, p. 53; Stawska, Bojarski, Chudziak 2010b, pp. 76–77; Kajkowski 2013, p. 166	Double grave of a male and female. Both of the individuals were probably decapitated prior to burial
15.	Milicz, Lower Silesian Voivodeship	229	M	*Adultus*	E-W	None	Falis 2013, pp. 70–71	The head/skull was laid face down
16.	Niemcza, Lower Silesian Voivodeship	62	M	*Iuvenis*	W-E	None	Falis 2013, pp. 73–74	-
17.	Niemcza, Lower Silesian Voivodeship	66	M	*Maturus*	W-E	None	Falis 2013, p. 74	The head/skull was laid face down
18.	Płock Podolszyce, Masovian Voivodeship	30/84	?	?	E-W	None	Łuczak, Kordala 1995, pp. 5, 11; Falis 2013, pp. 75–76	-
19.	Samborzec*, Świętokrzyskie Voivodeship	4	F?	*Adultus/ Maturus*	W-E	Temple ring and an iron knife	Falis 2013, p. 78	On the margin of the cemetery
20.	Sandomierz (Wzgórze Świętojakubskie), Świętokrzyskie Voivodeship	10	?	?	?	Knife	Stanaszek 1998, pp. 24–25	An iron knife was found between the ribs

No.	Site	Grave number	Sex	Age	Orientation	Grave goods	References	Comments
21.	Sandomierz (Wzgórze Świętojakubskie), Świętokrzyskie Voivodeship	26	M	?	E-W	Arrowhead	Gąssowski 1969, p. 408; Stanaszek 1998, p. 26	An arrowhead was found stuck in the spine
22.	Sandomierz, Świętokrzyskie Voivodeship	101	?	?	E-W	None	Falis 2013, pp. 80–81	The grave was isolated from other graves in the cemetery
23.	Sowinki, Greater Poland Voivodeship	404	?	*Adultus*	NW-SE	None	Krzyszowski 1992, p. 89; 2000	The grave contained fragments of charcoal and a small stone placed between the legs of the deceased. Additionally, the grave was located on the margin of the cemetery
24.	Stary Brześć Kujawski, Kuyavian-Pomeranian Voivodeship	446	M	*Adultus* (around 25)	?	None	Kapica 1968; Stanaszek 2016b, pp. 23–26	Dated between the 12th–14th centuries. The decapitated head was placed between the feet of the deceased (similar to grave 146 from Cedynia – see above)
25.	Wolin Młynówka, West Pomeranian Voivodeship	15(29)	M	*Adultus* (25–35)	SE-NW	None	Wokroj 1967, p. 304; Wojtasik 1968, pp. 17, 206–207; Żydok 2004, pp. 48, 50; Wrzesiński 2008b, p. 153; Gardeła 2011a, pp. 39, 45–46; Stanaszek 2016b, pp. 28–29	The individual was buried in a partly prone position (with the chest directed towards the ground). The legs were flexed and crossed (the right one lay over the left), which might imply that they were bound prior to burial
26.	Wolin Wzgórze Wisielców, West Pomeranian Voivodeship	?	M	?	?	None	Cnotliwy 1963; Wojtasik 1968, pp. 207–208; Malinowska-Łazarczyk 1982(I), p. 107; Krzyszowski 2000, p. 123	Traces of a wooden post were found between the legs of the deceased. The missing head/skull may have been attached to this post and remained visible on the surface of the cemetery

CHAPTER 6
EXECUTION BY STONING AND BURIAL UNDER STONES

1. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Stoning is a violent and visually dramatic form of execution which leads to a very slow and painful death. Textual, ethnographic and modern accounts demonstrate that it is typically performed by a group of people who, through this often spontaneous and instinctive act, seek to collectively exercise justice upon a convict. In other words, stoning is an expression of 'mob violence'[1] and as such helps to wipe out the guilt that is weighing down the community.

When the act of stoning is explored in a historical and cross-cultural perspective, it immediately becomes apparent that it has a very ancient origin and was well known among numerous societies in various parts of the world, including the Greeks,[2] Iberians, Macedonians, Persians, Semites,[3] and the Germanic peoples.[4] In the Early Middle Ages it was practiced among the Slavs as well, but before we explore its different expressions in the Slavic world it is essential to examine its basic meanings and motivations in other cultural milieus.

Some of the earliest descriptions of stoning pertain to Ancient Greece, where it seems to have been a punishment for rape and treason. Judging by the information preserved in textual accounts, however, it appears that this form of execution was not practiced very frequently among the Greeks.[5] What is both interesting and quite exceptional, however, is that apart from being a death penalty, stoning appears to have had an additional symbolic dimension. According to Ström, stoning:

> (...) constituted a radical defensive penal action, a ritual method with a strong magical colouring that was intended to remove the pollution that was the consequence of a grave crime and that was incorporated in the criminal.[6]

Blinzler observes that, unlike in Greece stoning among the Semitic peoples in Israel was actually a customary form of execution. In the Old Testament, it was inflicted for a number of different offences, including idolatry, blasphemy, profanation of the Sabbath, divination, rebellion against parents, adultery by a betrothed woman, kidnapping, murder and the appropriation of banned objects.[7]

We can infer from a number of textual accounts that stoning in the Middle Ages was employed as an act of punishment for a variety of offences. Old Norse sagas, for example, are particularly rich in descriptions of stoning performed among Scandinavian settlers in Iceland.[8] As we shall see further below, these sources suggest that stoning was typically employed as a form of execution of malevolent sorcerers who engaged in the performance of magic known as *seiðr*.[9] Interestingly, both men and women could be subjected to such executions and several accounts indicate that their bodies were afterwards additionally heaped with stones (e.g. *Laxdœla saga*, *Gísla saga Súrssonar*).[10]

It is important to note that the custom of stoning did not cease in the Middle Ages and is still performed today among some ethnic and religious groups, such as the Taliban in Afghanistan, ISIS in Iraq, and Boko

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[1] Rosivach 1987.

[2] Rosivach 1987.

[3] Blinzler 1970.

[4] Hirzel 1909.

[5] Rosivach 1987, pp. 235–236, 245.

[6] Ström 1942, p. 110.

[7] Blinzler 1970, p. 147.

[8] Ström 1942, pp. 102–115.

[9] On *seiðr* magic see, for example, Price 2002; Gardeła 2016d.

[10] I have thoroughly analysed various Old Norse accounts of stoning in a number of my previous studies. See, for example, Gardeła 2010b; 2011b; 2012b; 2012c; 2016d, pp. 79–88.

Haram in Nigeria.[11] Under Islamic law, stoning is the prescribed punishment in cases of adultery.

The various textual accounts from antiquity and the Middle Ages that describe the act of stoning and the custom of burying criminals under stones are remarkable, not only because they offer a glimpse into the world of legal culture of past societies, but also because they can provide an exciting interpretative background to peculiar mortuary phenomena found during archaeological excavations. Graves containing stones of different shapes and sizes lying directly on skeletal remains have been discovered from diverse cultural milieus. A number of these come from early medieval cemeteries in Poland – the best known example probably being that of a male individual buried under a heap of stones in the early medieval cemetery at Radom, already mentioned in the previous chapters of this book.[12] These findings might sometimes offer tangible evidence that stoning, perhaps as a form of execution, preceded the burial or formed an important part of funerary rites. Alternatively, the presence of stones within graves may indicate different, not necessarily negative, emotions towards the deceased.

Although analyses of stoned burials have the potential to provide valuable information about many different aspects of the past, in Polish archaeology they have often been interpreted in a very simplistic way and predominantly seen as representing apotropaic measures intended to hold the 'dangerous dead' in their graves. As will be shown below, the interpretation of stoned burials as belonging *only* to alleged revenants is difficult to sustain, and judging by the evidence that we have at hand, it seems that the custom of placing stones on the cadavers had a much wider range of meanings than previously postulated.[13]

In order to revise the current view on the practice of stoning in early medieval Poland, the sections below will provide a thorough reevaluation of all instances of stoned burials dating between the late tenth and thirteenth centuries. As in the previous chapters of this monograph, a list of all graves of this type known to the author, along with anthropological/osteological information about the deceased and a comprehensive bibliography, has been included in the accompanying table (**Table 3**). In some cases, specific details concerning the types and sizes of stones from particular graves have also been provided.

2. STONED BURIALS IN EARLY MEDIEVAL POLAND: SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES

Over twenty early medieval graves containing stones placed directly on the cadavers have been discovered in Poland. As mentioned above, they generally date from the late tenth to thirteenth centuries, but the practice of laying stones directly on corpses seems to have prevailed among the Western Slavs until at least the nineteenth century. Late medieval and early modern examples of stoning will not be discussed in detail here, but some comments on the development of this practice will nevertheless be provided.[14]

National patterning of stoned burials

The custom of placing stones on the deceased seems to have been particularly popular in Western Pomerania. Instances of laying stones on the dead are also known from a range of early medieval cemeteries in Greater Poland and there are several examples from Chełmno land, Silesia and Masovia (**Fig. 6.1**). In each of these areas, the rite of stoning had different forms, implying that its meanings among early medieval societies were also varied.

In Western Pomerania, the practice of placing stones on cadavers is attested from Cedynia (sites 2 an 2a), where two distinctive variants of this funerary rite can be isolated:[15]

- Placing stones directly on the body of the deceased – graves 63, 68, 186, 639 (**Fig. 6.2**)
- Substituting missing or misplaced body parts with stones – graves 60, 146, 196, 215, 530, 552, 888 (see Chapter 5)

With one exception,[16] where a woman had five stones lying on her feet and legs (grave 68), all of the dead

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[11] See Max Rodenbeck, *How She Wants to Modify Muslims*, The New York Review, December 3, 2015 Issue. Online at http://www.nybooks.com/articles/2015/12/03/ayaan-hirsi-ali-wants-modify-muslims/ (accessed 6.12.2016).

[12] Gąssowski 1950; Stanaszek 2016b, pp. 20–21.

[13] For the interpretations of stoned burials as those of revenants or vampires see, for example, Gąssowski 1950; Żydok 2004; Stawska 2006a, pp. 57–58; Porzeziński 2008; Stanaszek 2016a, pp. 39, 74, 82–83, 94–95; Wawrzeniuk 2016, p. 226.

[14] On the use of stones during burials of suicides in the Late Middle Ages, see Duma 2010, pp. 77–78, 108.

[15] Malinowska-Łazarczyk 1982; Porzeziński 2008; for more recent discussions on the stoned graves from Cedynia, see Gardeła 2015a, pp. 118–121.

[16] Malinowska-Łazarczyk 1982(II), p. 21.

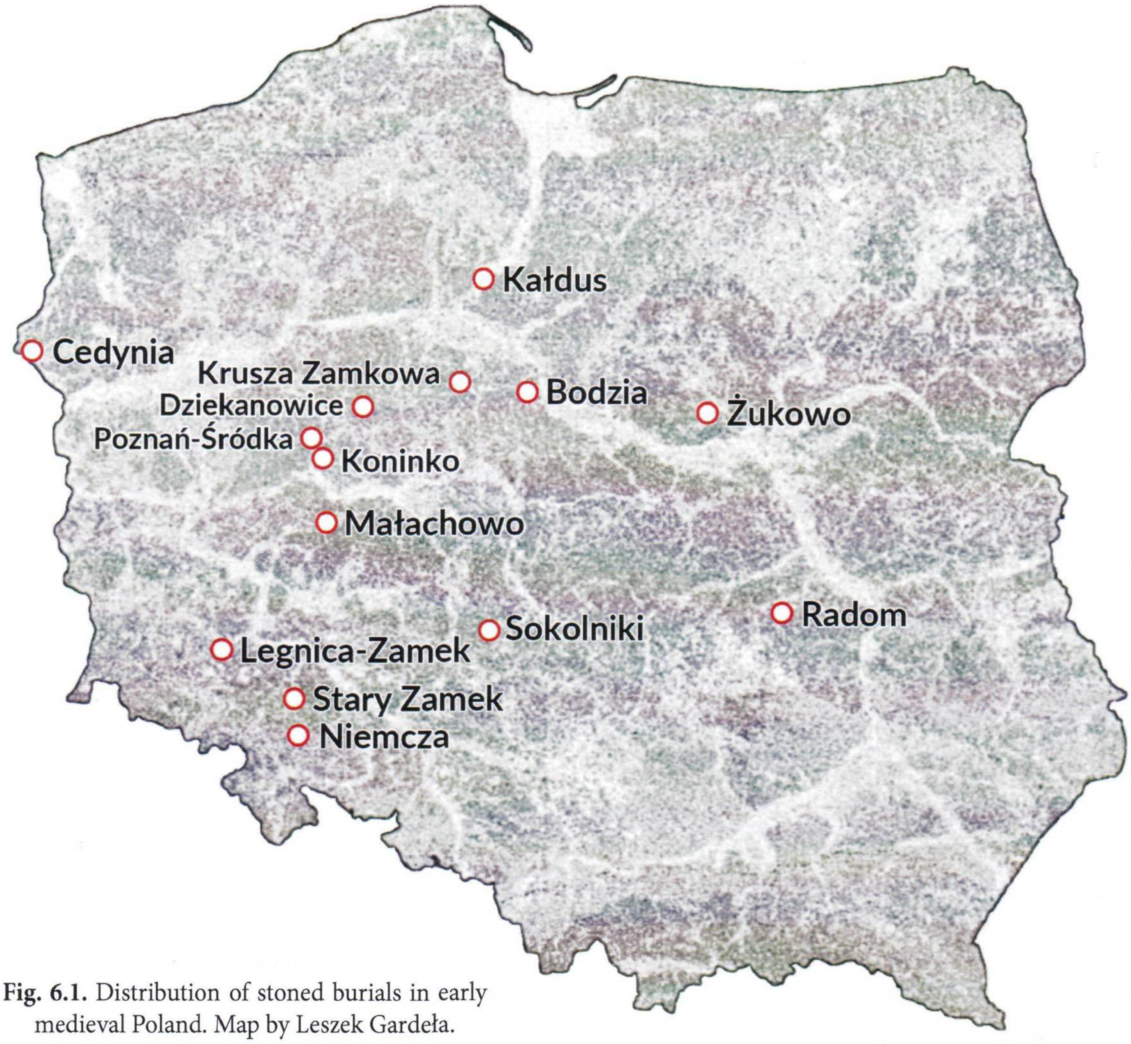

Fig. 6.1. Distribution of stoned burials in early medieval Poland. Map by Leszek Gardeła.

buried at Cedynia with stones covering or substituting for body parts were male.

In early medieval graves in Greater Poland, stones cover various parts of the body. In grave 15 at Koninko, stones of various size were found only on the lower parts of an adult female's body (**Fig. 6.3**) – a practice which largely resembles the treatment of the woman from the aforementioned grave 68 at Cedynia.[17] In grave 27/92 from Dziekanowice, a large stone (28×20×10cm) was placed on the pelvis of the deceased and several other stones were laid on the knees. This grave also included a small ball-shaped stone placed at the feet and a fragment of a corroded iron wire by the right leg.[18]

It is noteworthy that in some instances in Greater Poland stones were also used in graves of children – for example, in grave 1 from the cemetery at Poznań-Śródka they were placed on the body of a child aged 12–13;[19] and in grave 11/92 from Dziekanowice, which belonged to a 8–11 year-old child, two stones were placed under the legs, two under the right arm and four under the back.[20] It is possible that, in the latter case, the placing of stones underneath the child's body was intended to position the corpse in an aesthetic way, instead of being an act with prophylactic/apotropaic connotations. That stones could be used for creating a visually pleasing display of the corpse is suggested by comparative materials from an Anglo-Saxon cemetery at Raunds Furnells, which will be discussed in more detail further below.[21]

As regards the placement of stones in graves in Chełmno land, such practices have only been observed

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[17] Stępnik 2009a, pp. 271, 273–274; 2009b, pp. 27, 29.

[18] Wrzesińscy 1993, pp. 163.

[19] Pawlak 1998, pp. 222–224; Stępnik 2009a, p. 275.

[20] Wrzesińscy 1993, pp. 161, 171; Stępnik 2009a, p. 275; Gardeła 2011b, p. 175.

[21] Boddington 1996.

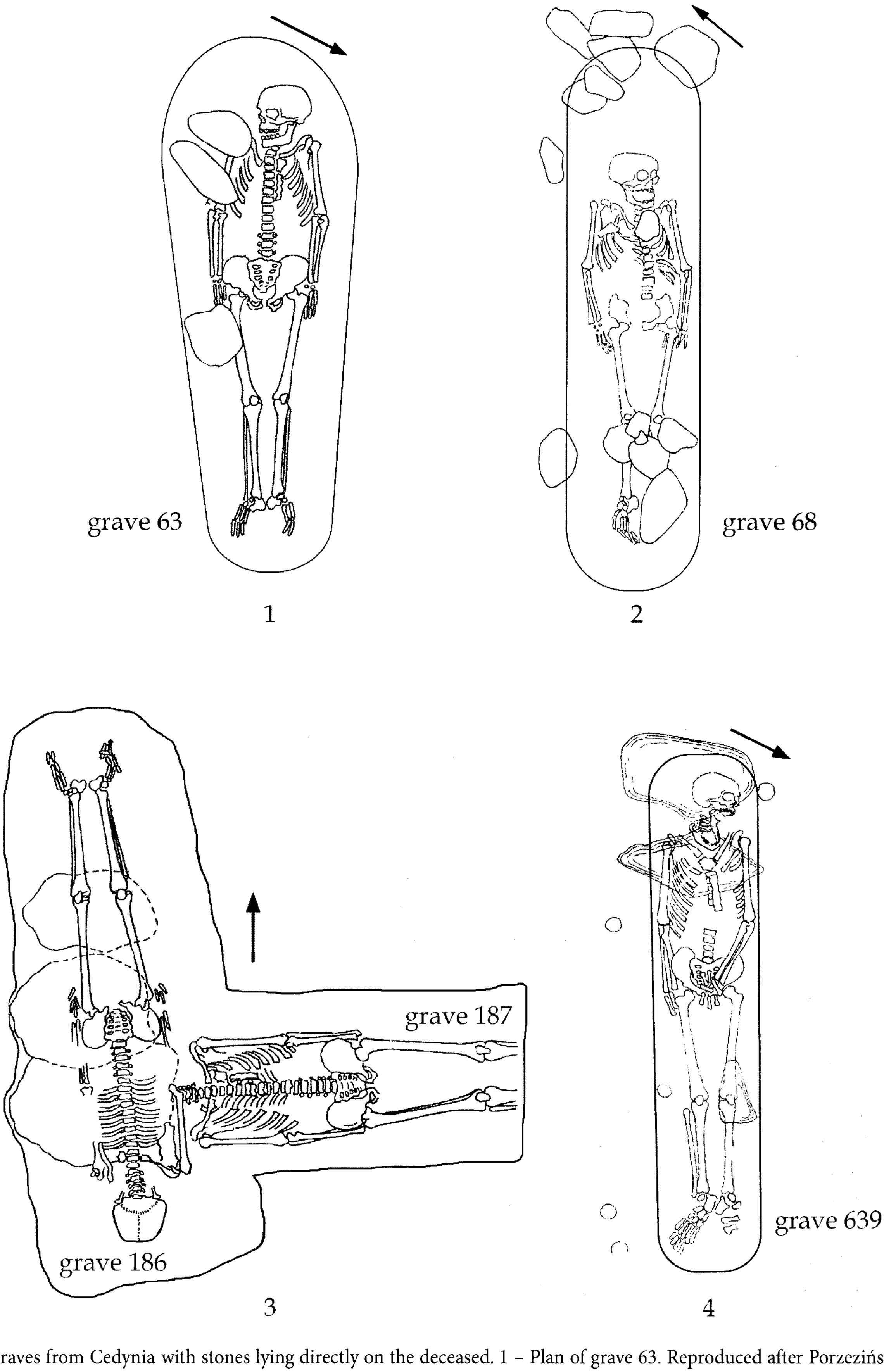
grave 63
grave 68
1
2
grave 187
grave 186
grave 639
3
4

Fig. 6.2. Graves from Cedynia with stones lying directly on the deceased. 1 – Plan of grave 63. Reproduced after Porzeziński 2008, p. 27. 2 – Plan of grave 68. Reproduced after Porzeziński 2008, p. 24. 3 – Plan of grave 186. Reproduced after Porzeziński 2008, p. 29. 4 – Plan of grave 639. Reproduced after Malinowska-Łazarczyk 1982(II), p. 153.

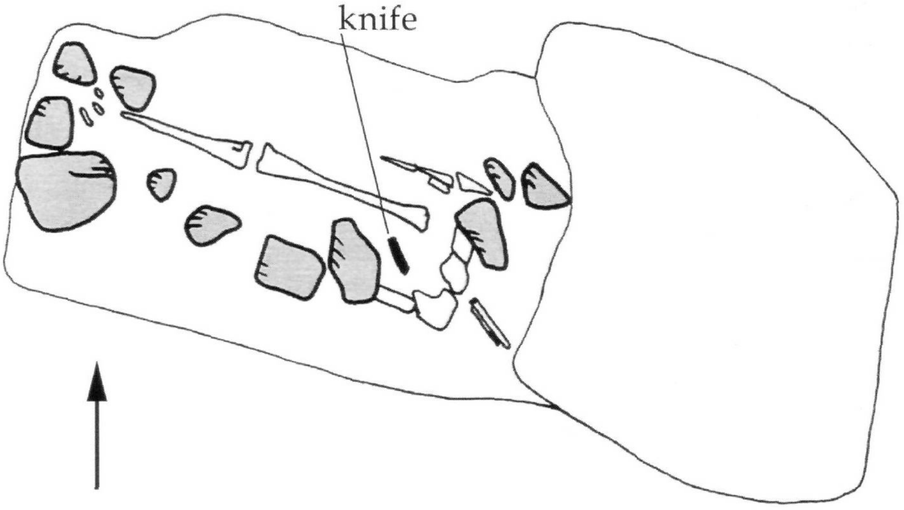

Fig. 6.3. Plan of grave 15 from Koninko. Reproduced after Stępnik 2009a, p. 291.

in two graves from the early medieval cemetery at Kałdus (site 4). In the female grave 32/00 (82), a flat stone lay on the lower part of the pelvis and between the thighs of the deceased[22] (**Fig. 6.4** and **6.5**), and in grave 48/00 a large piece of sandstone was placed over an individual buried on the left side in a crouched position (**Fig. 6.6**).[23]

A very interesting example of using a stone in a funerary context was discovered in the cemetery at Bodzia. A woman buried in grave E870 had a quern stone placed over her head.[24] Zamelska-Monczak sees this act as an attempt to hold the deceased in her grave or perhaps to safeguard the society against the woman's evil eye.[25] As we shall see below, in Anglo-Saxon England graves with quern stones are sometimes interpreted as belonging to female ritual specialists or 'cunning women'.

In Silesia, the practice of placing stones on cadavers is also relatively rare and seems to have had a different character than in Western Pomerania or Greater Poland, as demonstrated by the examples from the cemetery at Stary Zamek, where many of the deceased were found either surrounded by stones or with stones included in the grave fill.[26] As Wachowski argues, it would be unwise to classify this site as a cemetery for revenants (he uses the term 'vampires') on the basis of the occurrence of stones in so many graves.[27] Instead, it seems that the placing/throwing of stones was just a regularly performed local custom (perhaps even resulting from the geology of the burial site) without any special, apotropaic connotations. According to Wachowski, only one grave from this cemetery (grave 24), which included a single large stone placed directly on the chest of the deceased, could be interpreted as reflecting the fear of a revenant, but this of course is just one of several possible explanations (**Fig. 6.7**).[28]

Apart from Stary Zamek, stones on the dead have also been discovered in three other cemeteries in Silesia – Legnica-Zamek (grave 22), [29] Niemcza (grave 104)[30] and Sokolniki.[31] In the case of Legnica-Zamek, the deceased adult was buried in a crouched position on the right side (which might imply that his body had been tied)[32] and the grave pit was filled with stones. This grave deviated considerably from all others in the cemetery and was additionally peculiar in that the buried individual had a hunchback.[33] Grave 104 from Niemcza is similar to grave 24 from Stary Zamek, in the sense that a large stone slab (weighing over a dozen kilograms) was placed on the pelvis of the deceased. In the case of Niemcza, however, the individual was a female aged 40–50 at the moment of death (**Fig. 6.8** and **Fig. 6.9**).[34] In their report from the excavations in the early medieval cemetery at Sokolniki in Silesia, Halina Śledzik-Kamińska and Maria Terlecka mention that large stones were found lying on two male individuals from graves 5[35] and 16, and on one female from grave 15. Interestingly, grave 18 from the same site included a stone placed in the mouth of the deceased.[36]

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[22] Bojarski, Chudziak, Drozd, Koperkiewicz, Kozłowski, Stawska 2010, p. 446.

[23] Bojarski, Chudziak, Drozd, Koperkiewicz, Kozłowski, Stawska 2010, p. 452.

[24] Sobkowiak-Tabaka 2015, pp. 130–131; Zamelska-Monczak 2015, pp. 310–311.

[25] Zamelska-Monczak 2015, p. 311.

[26] For comments on the use of stones in various graves from Stary Zamek, see Wachowski 1992, p. 16.

[27] Wachowski 1992, p. 19.

[28] Wachowski 1992, pp. 19, 42, 47.

[29] Stanaszek 2016a, p. 15.

[30] Stanaszek 2016b, pp. 18–19.

[31] Śledzik-Kamińska, Terlecka 1988, p. 66.

[32] This interpretation has been suggested by Stanaszek 2016b, p. 15.

[33] Stanaszek 2016b, p. 15.

Stones are abundant in Masovian graves, where they often form part of their external structures.[37] It is therefore difficult to isolate examples of graves in which stones lay directly over the bodies of the deceased from those in which stones had originally formed part of the external structure and subsided after some time due to post-depositional processes.

The most evident example of placing or throwing stones directly on the body is represented by grave 47 in the early medieval cemetery at Radom, which has already been mentioned above (**Fig. 6.10** and **Fig. 6.11**).[38] The buried individual was an adult man who died at the age of 25–35. He was laid on his side with his face directed towards the ground, his arms bent at the elbows and hands placed by his chin. Based on the peculiar alignment of his body, several scholars have suggested that the man was tied up[39] before being covered with as many as sixteen stones, each weighing between 20–30kg. Over the stones, a number of pottery shards have been found which date to the eleventh century. The same cemetery at Radom also had one more grave in which a single stone was placed directly on the body of the deceased (grave 32).[40] The published plan of the site shows that it was located in the northern part of the cemetery and that the body was aligned east-west, with the head to the west. The grave does not seem to have been isolated in any special way from other graves at the site or situated in a marginal area.[41]

In addition to the two examples from Radom, one grave (9/9a) from the cemetery at Żukowo in Masovia could also possibly be interpreted as having stones placed directly over the deceased (**Fig. 6.12**).[42] This grave is remarkable, since it contains two superimposed individuals (labelled 9 and 9a).[43] The stones were placed around the dead and, upon discovery, lay directly over the pelvis of the 'upper' individual 9a. It is unclear whether the two individuals had been buried simultaneously, but there is a strong possibility that a consecutive burial was performed in which the original grave of individual 9 was reopened to add

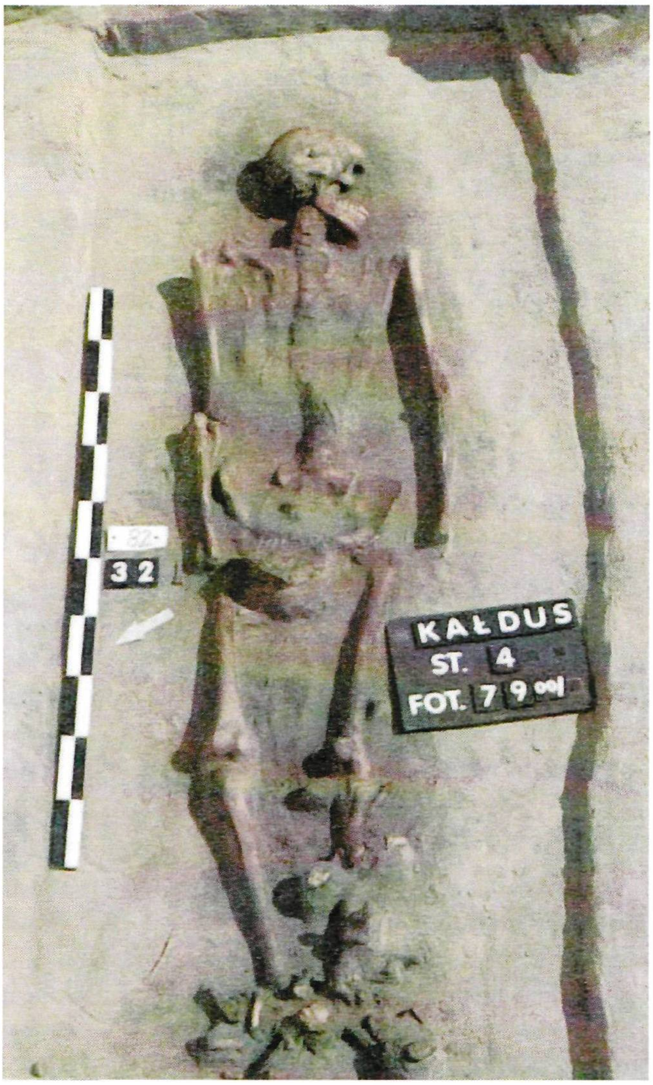

Fig. 6.4. Photo of grave 32/00 (82) from Kałdus. After Bojarski, Chudziak, Drozd, Koperkiewicz, Kozłowski, Stawska 2010, p. 356.

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[34] Stanaszek 2016b, pp. 18–19.

[35] The individual from grave 5 was apparently stabbed with a knife.

[36] Śledzik-Kamińska, Terlecka 1988, p. 66.

[37] See, for example, Rauhut 1971; Rauhut, Długopolska 1971; Kordala 2006; Dzik 2015a; 2015b.

[38] Gąssowski 1950, pp. 321–322; Stanaszek 2016b, pp. 20–21.

[39] Gąssowski 1950, p. 322; Stanaszek 2016b, p. 20.

[40] Kurasiński, Skóra 2013, p. 149. This grave was discovered during an excavation campaign in 1966.

[41] Kurasiński, Skóra 2013, p. 148.

[42] Dzik 2006, pp. 29–31.

[43] Superimposed burials occur relatively rarely in early medieval cemeteries in Poland. Some of them might suggest that the original grave had been reopened and that the consecutive individual was added after some time. For more details about the practice of reopening graves, see Chapter 7.

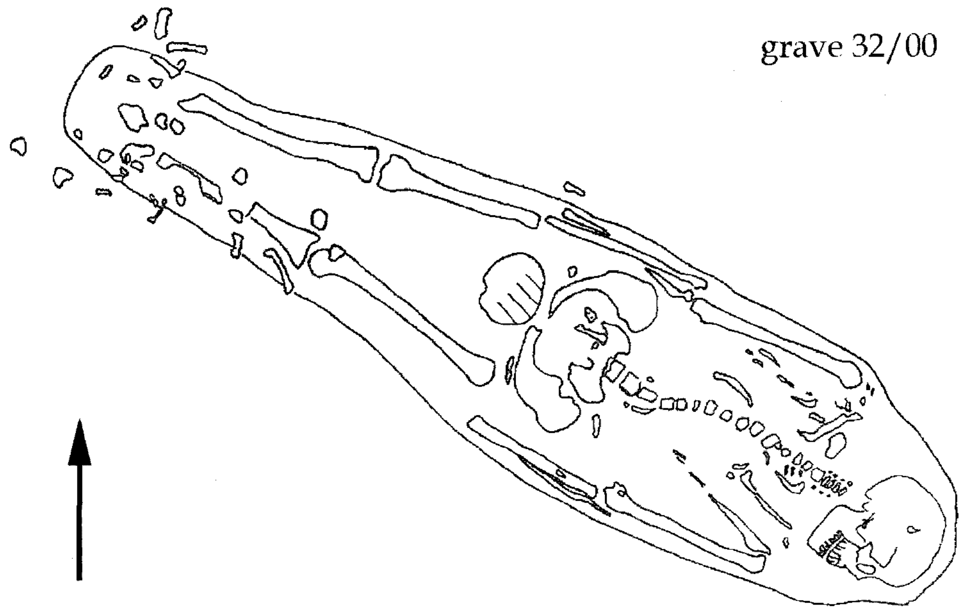

Fig. 6.5. Drawing of grave 32/00 from Kałdus. After Bojarski, Chudziak, Drozd, Koperkiewicz, Kozłowski, Stawska 2010, p. 223.

individual 9a.[44] The remains of the 'upper' individual 9a are interpreted as belonging to a female, whereas those of the 'lower' individual 9 are regarded as male. Both of the deceased were accompanied by a relatively wide array of objects (e.g. a strike-a-light, two spurs, a knife, a temple ring, and pottery fragments). Traces of wood underneath and along the sides of the skeletons imply that the dead could have been interred in coffins, probably of a rectangular shape.[45] If this was indeed the case, it is possible that some or all of the stones found directly over the remains of individual 9a upon excavation were originally placed over the coffin but subsided when the wood decomposed. There is an alternative possibility, however, that the traces of wood around the skeletons may not represent decomposed coffins, but rather the remains of wood lining the grave pit. This interpretation is not unlikely, and would explain the abundance of objects accompanying the deceased, which would otherwise be difficult to fit inside a narrow coffin.[46] If we accept that the deceased were buried in a pit lined with wood rather than in coffins, then it is also possible that the stones were actually placed directly over the body of individual 9a. We must approach this case with considerable caution, however, because its original documentation is problematic and does not meet modern standards.[47] The child buried in grave 13 from the same site could also have been covered with stones, but again this is difficult to prove based on the available documentation.[48]

Stones in child burials

In addition to the aforementioned grave from Poznań-Śródka (grave 1) with stones lying directly on the body of a child, further examples of stones placed on children have been found in the medieval cemetery at Byczyna in Silesia. At this site, however, stones were placed on children's necks (**Fig. 6.13**).[49] The meaning of this practice could be manifold. On the one hand, it could be interpreted in light of ethnographic accounts as a prophylactic act intended to prevent the restless dead from 'biting'.[50] As Barber interestingly observes:

> Among the Slavs it is commonly reported that a corpse with an open mouth is likely to be a vampire, and in War and Peace the mouth of the elder Bolkonsky is tied shut after his death, presumably to avert this possibility. Similarly, the Greeks are reported to tie the hands and feet of the corpse together and to tie the mouth shut, but the bonds are later untied, since it is believed that otherwise the corpse will not decompose.[51]

On the other hand, it could have had a more prosaic purpose as a measure to prevent the jaw from dropping, thereby ensuring an aesthetic display of the corpse during the funeral.

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[44] See Dzik 2006, p. 29 for discussion.

[45] Dzik 2006, p. 29.

[46] Dzik 2006, p. 62.

[47] See discussion in Dzik 2006, pp. 29–31.

[48] Dzik 2006, p. 32.

[49] Przysiężna-Pizarska 2009, p. 29.

[50] Barber 2010, pp. 36, 47.

[51] Barber 2010, p. 36.

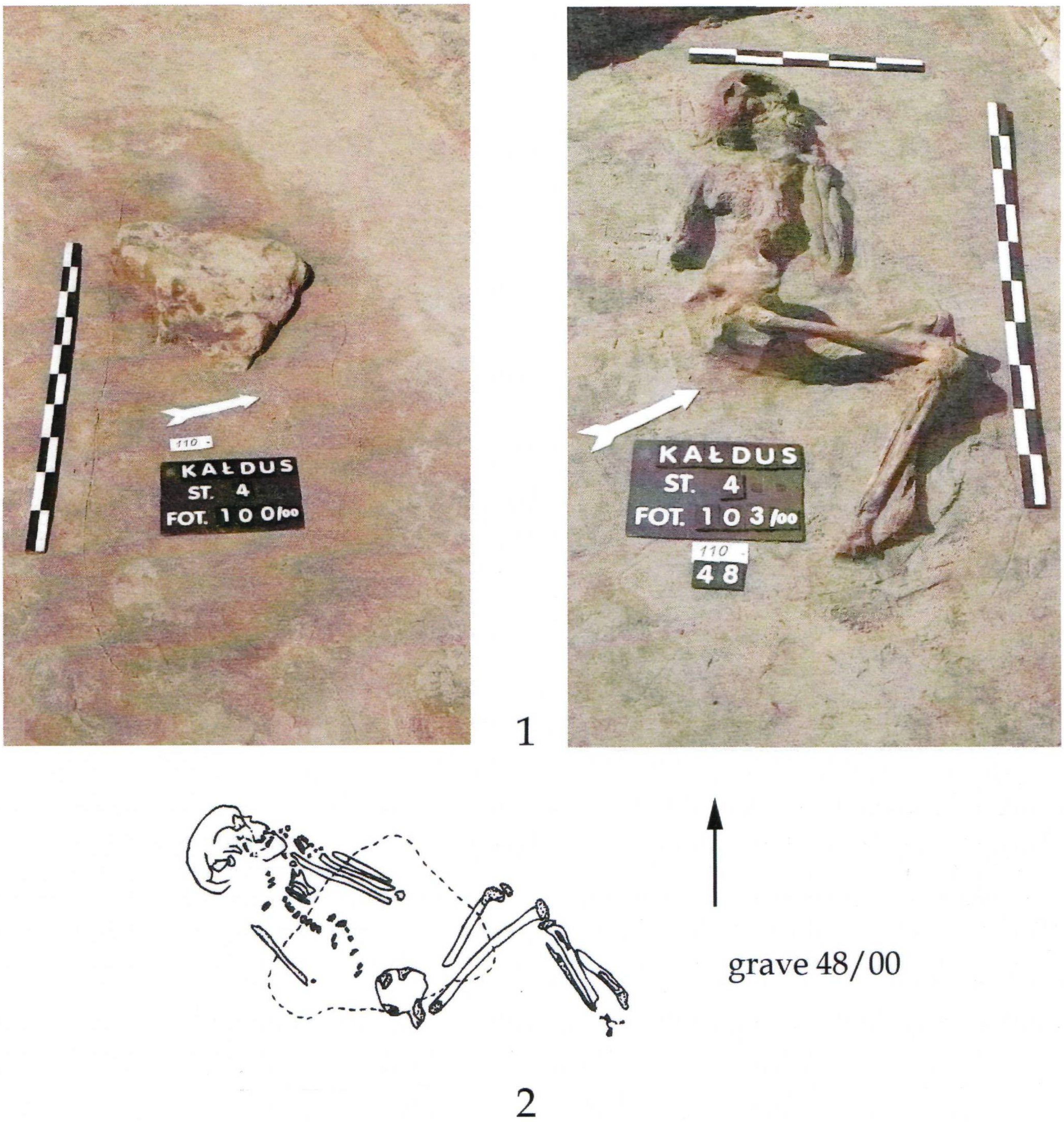

Fig. 6.6. Photographs of grave 48/00. After Bojarski, Chudziak, Drozd, Koperkiewicz, Kozłowski, Stawska 2010, p. 358. Drawing of grave 48/00 after Bojarski, Chudziak, Drozd, Koperkiewicz, Kozłowski, Stawska 2010, p. 226.

Spatial location of stoned burials within cemeteries

The distribution of stoned burials in early medieval Poland is varied: they are found in both churchyard and non-churchyard cemeteries. As for the location of stoned burials within particular cemeteries, only some of them are situated on the margins, while others are integrated into the site and surrounded by 'normal' graves.

Grave 24 from Stary Zamek could be viewed as being in a marginal area of the cemetery, and this might perhaps suggest an attempt to emphasise the otherness of the deceased (**Fig. 6.14**). However, the four other graves in the same row do not display any atypical features, so it is difficult to argue that this part of the cemetery was a place designated for the burial of suspicious or dangerous individuals. Comparative

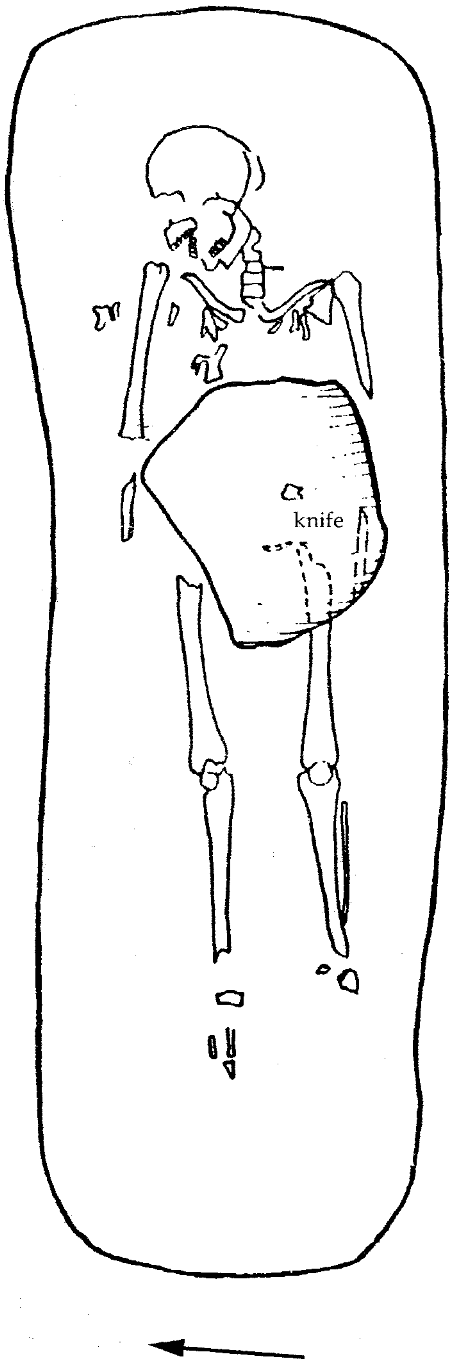

Fig. 6.7. Grave 24 from Stary Zamek. Reproduced after Wachowski 1992, p. 47.

evidence and textual sources imply that the occurrence of stoned burials on the margins of cemeteries, or in liminal locations (e.g. mountain ridges or beaches), could be an indication of the peculiar nature of the deceased and the desire to separate them from the rest of the dead. However, it is difficult to make this case for stoned burials in early medieval Poland.

Grave goods in stoned burials

Most of the stoned burials from early medieval Poland are devoid of objects, although some of them do contain small utensils or jewellery. The meanings of these items are not easy to unravel – they may have been personal possessions of the dead, or belonged to mourners who placed them in the grave during the funerary ceremony with some special intention in mind. In some instances, the way that the objects accompanying the deceased are positioned implies that they had a very particular role to play, but it is difficult to determine what exactly this might have been.

The individual buried in grave 60 at Cedynia (site 2) had a ring made of thick bronze tape with an inscription saying HANUT + HUNUT.[52] In grave 215 from the same site, a female was buried with a single temple ring made of bronze.[53] Interestingly, the temple ring lay underneath a stone which substituted for the woman's missing skull. The most lavishly equipped stoned burial from site 2 at Cedynia (grave 552) contained a leather band with fifteen fittings made of bronze foil, and a bronze belt buckle.[54] Apart from Cedynia, no other stoned burials from Western Pomerania contained grave goods.

Greater Poland is an area where stoned burials seem to have been furnished with objects more often than elsewhere. The 8–10 year-old child buried in grave 11/92 in the cemetery at Dziekanowice was accompanied by an iron knife which, remarkably, was set up vertically in the ground, a very unusual sight in a Slavic grave from the early medieval period. The practice of thrusting weapons or other sharp objects in graves is attested from Viking Age Scandinavia and – based on several Old Norse textual accounts such as *Ynglinga saga*, *Gautreks saga* and others – has been interpreted as a ritual intended to dedicate the dead to Óðinn.[55] It is unclear what such a practice may have meant in the case of the grave from Dziekanowice, however. Another grave from the same site (grave 27/92) contained a large stone on the pelvis of the deceased, a ball-shaped stone (**Fig. 6.15**), and a fragment of corroded iron wire. Very rich furnishings were discovered in grave 1 from Poznań-Śródka which belonged to a child aged 12–13 years old – the child

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[52] Malinowska-Łazarczyk 1982(II), p. 19.

[53] Malinowska-Łazarczyk 1982(II), p. 54.

[54] Malinowska-Łazarczyk 1982(II), p. 130.

[55] On the motif of thrusting weapons in early medieval graves, see Nordberg 2002; 2003; Artelius 2005; Wickholm 2006; Stylegar 2007, p. 89; Gardeła 2010a.

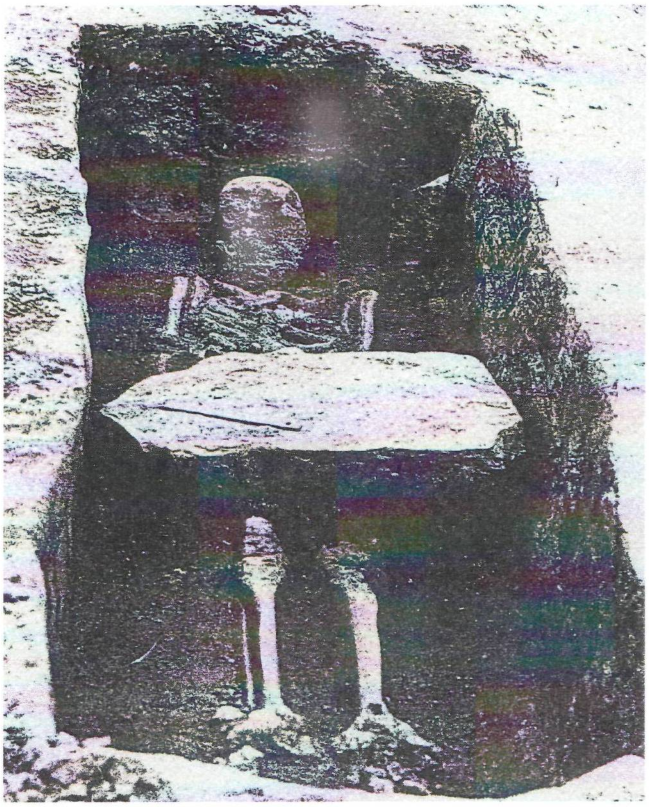

Fig. 6.8. Photo of grave 104 from Niemcza. After Stanaszek 2016b, p. 19.

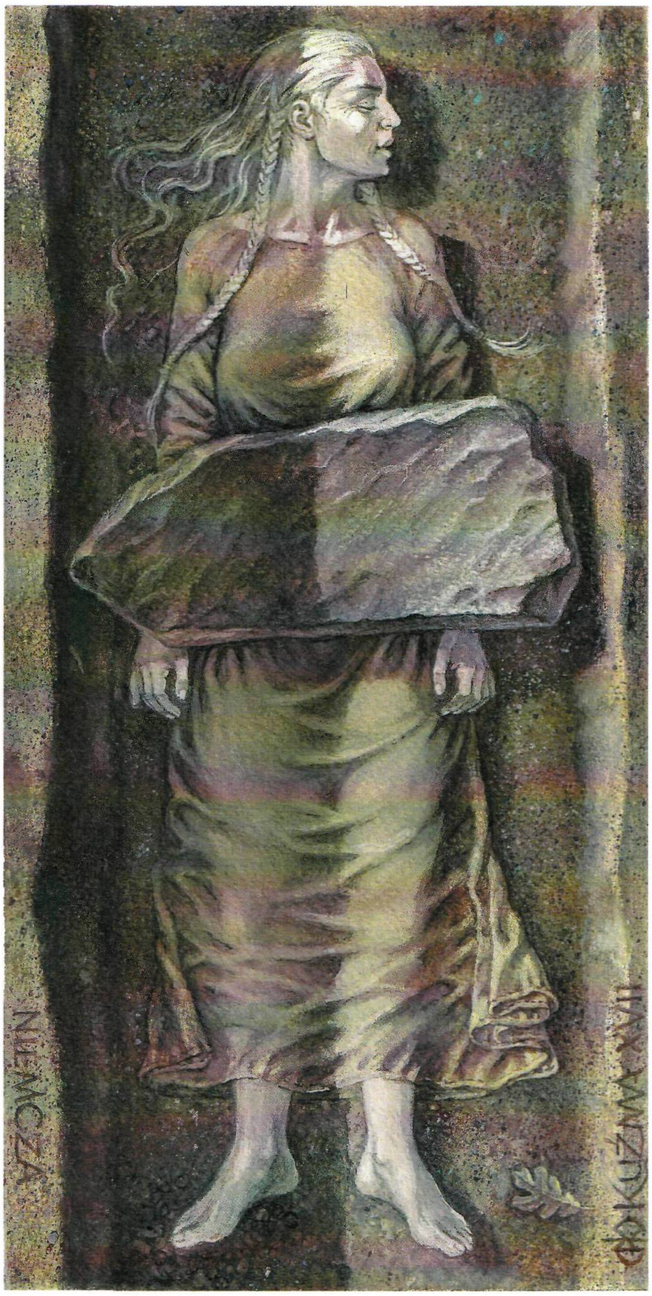

Fig. 6.9. Reconstruction of grave 104 from Niemcza. Illustration by Mirosław Kuźma. Copyright by Leszek Gardeła and Mirosław Kuźma.

was accompanied by an iron object (probably a pin), an iron nail, a fragment of silver foil, and a badly preserved iron knife. In addition, there were 193 pieces of pottery, the remains of charcoal (*Pinus* sp.), and numerous animal bones (2 fragments of fish bone, 1 fragment of sheep bone, 1 fragment of a bird's bone and 10 other unidentified bone fragments). In the grave of an adult female discovered at Koninko in Greater Poland (grave 15) an iron knife in a leather scabbard with copper alloy fittings was found (**Fig. 6.16**). Additionally, this grave contained pieces of textile, probably from the deceased woman's clothes.

A number of grave goods were discovered in grave 9 at Żukowo. Among them – in addition to some small unidentified objects – was an iron strike-a-light, an iron knife, two iron spurs and some pottery fragments.

A single knife was also found in grave 24 at Stary Zamek belonging to an adult man, who was buried with a large stone placed directly on his pelvis. The knife may have been his possession, or perhaps an object that served some special role during the mortuary procedure. If the man was a criminal, then the knife may have been used in his execution, perhaps to slit his throat or inflict some other wound. This is, of course, pure speculation, and is impossible to determine with any certainty. As mentioned above, a knife was also found in grave 5 at Sokolniki.

The occurrence of grave goods in stoned burials of children deserves closer attention. Perhaps the placement of various objects in children's graves reflects notions of care or affection and the desire of the mourners to provide the children with items that could be useful in the afterlife? Grave 11/92 from Dziekanowice, where the child had a number of stones under different parts of its body, suggests that considerable effort was made

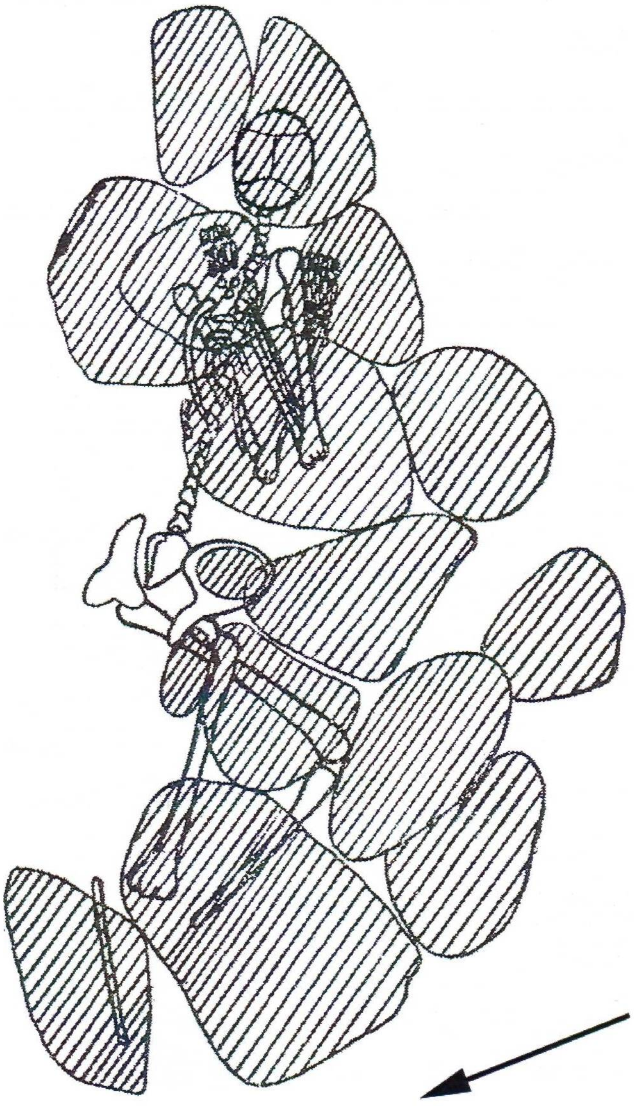

Fig. 6.10. Plan of grave 47 from Radom. Reproduced after Kurasiński, Skóra 2016, p. 37.

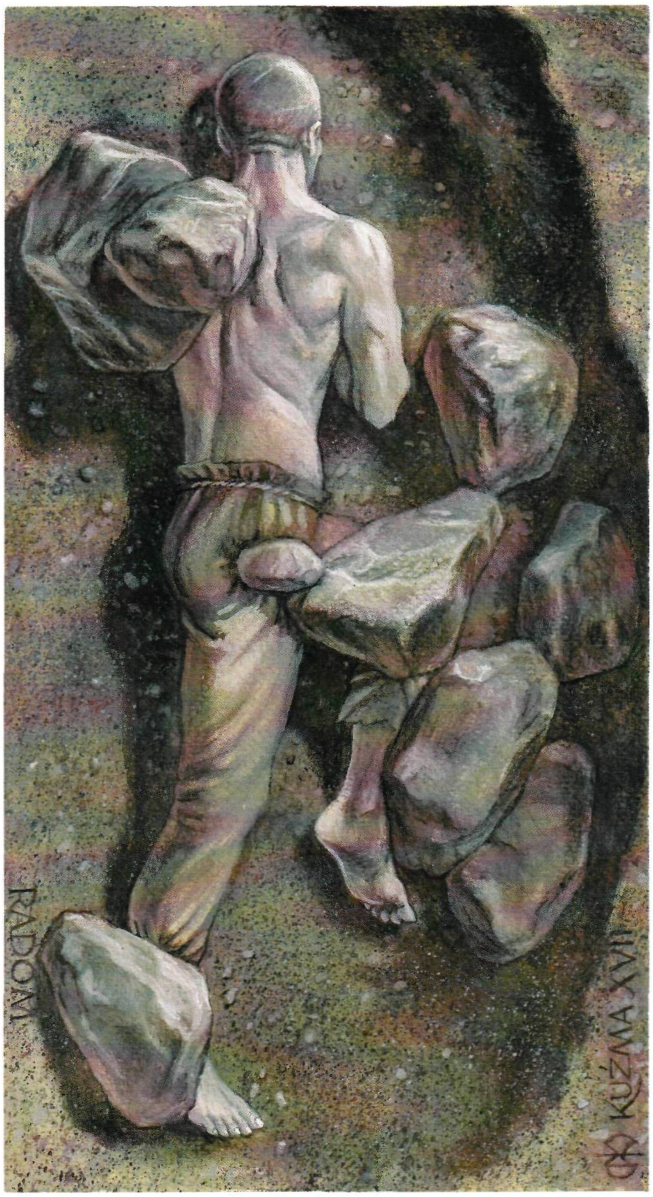

Fig. 6.11. Reconstruction of grave 47 from Radom. Illustration by Mirosław Kuźma. Copyright by Leszek Gardeła and Mirosław Kuźma.

to position the corpse in a desired way. Instead of seeing it as a grave of a 'child revenant', it seems more probable to regard it as belonging to a child whom the mourners wanted to bury in a respectful and visually aesthetic way. Grave 1 from Poznań-Śródka, which contains a child buried with a number of objects and animal remains, could also be interpreted in this light – the grave goods may have been intended for use and consumption in the Otherworld. Alternatively, if the animal remains were not simply food for the dead child, they may have been intended to communicate some very special symbolic meanings. It is noteworthy that the three different species of animals whose remains were found in this grave could possibly refer to three different realms or elements – that of water (fish), earth (sheep) and air/sky (bird). In addition, the charcoal remains could be seen as symbolising fire. However, it is extremely difficult to unravel with any degree of certainty what deeper meaning (if any) may have been intended by these objects.

Stoned burials in combination with other atypical practices

Stoned burials coincide with decapitation only in several graves at Cedynia where stones substitute for the heads

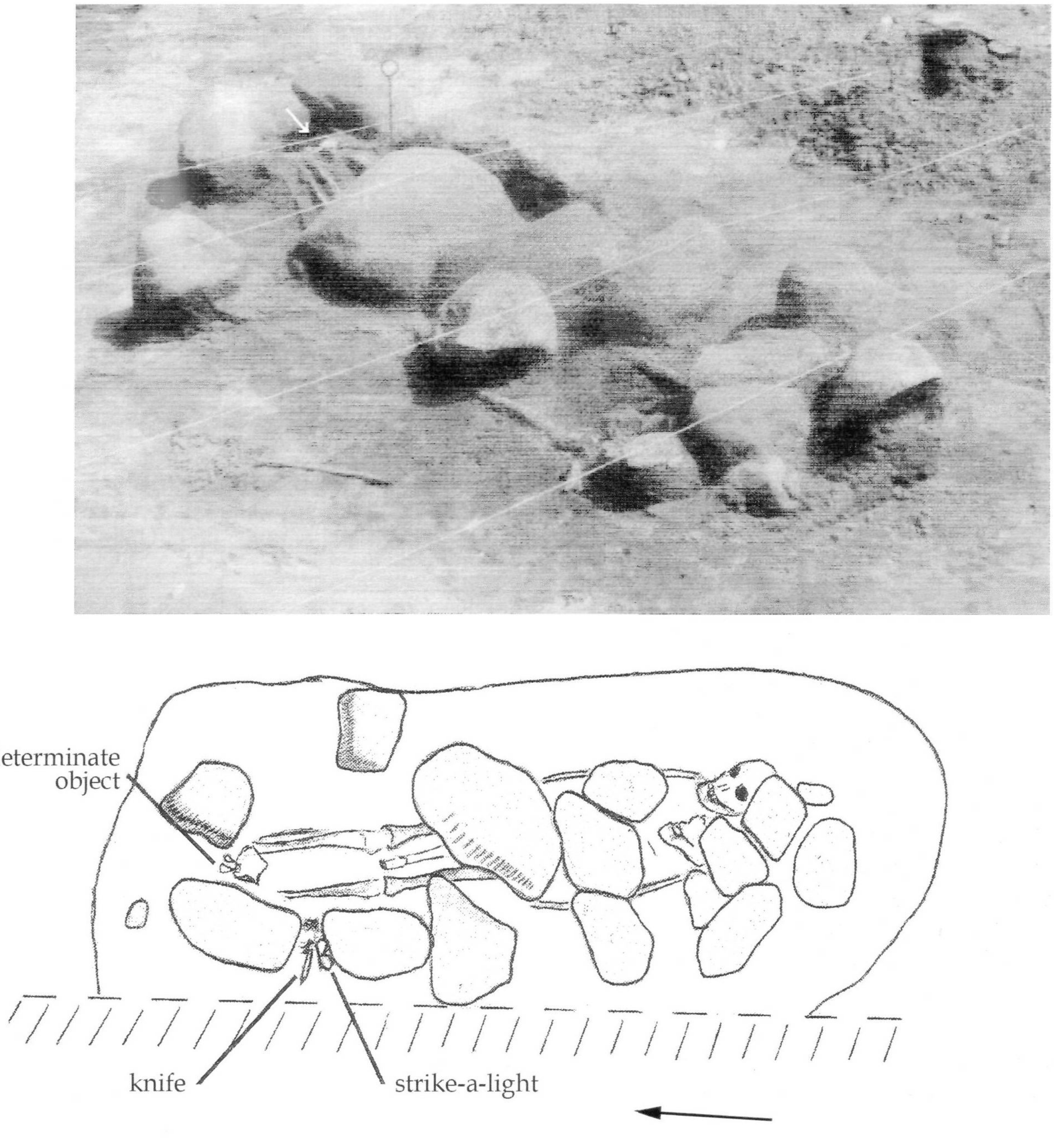

Fig. 6.12. Grave 9–9a from Żukowo. Photo after Dzik 2006, fig. 12. Plan reproduced after Dzik 2006, fig. 11.

(see Chapter 5 for more details). The individual buried in grave 47 at Radom was laid on his side and his face was directed towards the ground before being covered with stones. As I have mentioned above, judging from the peculiar position of his limbs, it is possible to argue that his body was additionally tied. Apart from these instances, the individuals buried with stones over their bodies do not seem to have been subjected to any other special funerary treatment.

3. INTERPRETING STONED BURIALS IN EARLY MEDIEVAL POLAND

In attempting to unravel the meaning of stones in early medieval graves in Poland, it is necessary to examine them in the context of extant textual sources and in the light of other comparative evidence. In the following discussion, we shall first look at a range of written accounts that date to the medieval period and pertain

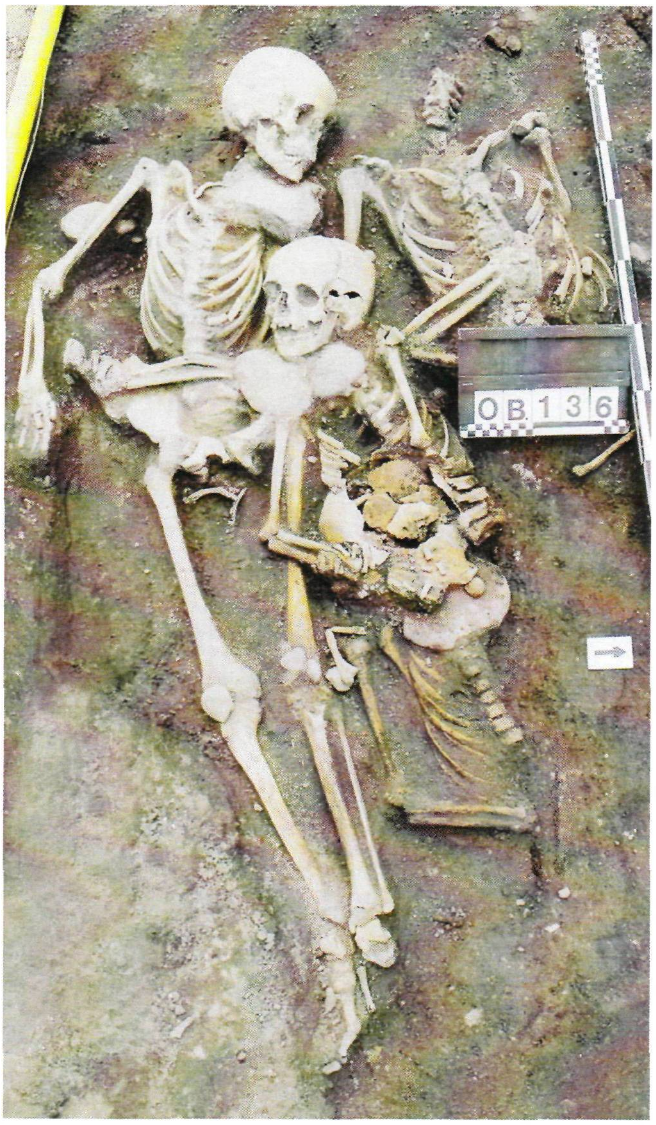

Fig. 6.13. Individuals buried with stones on their necks from Byczyna. After Przysiężna-Pizarska 2009, p. 29. Courtesy of Magdalena Przysiężna-Pizarska.

specifically to the area of Poland. This will be followed by overviews of the practice of stoning among the Viking Age Scandinavians and Anglo-Saxons.

Stoning in textual sources

The motif of stoning among the medieval Slavs had already attracted scholarly interest by the nineteenth century, and was first discussed academically in the work of Wawrzyniec Surowiecki from 1824.[56] It must be emphasised, however, that much of his study was based on pure speculation or unfounded arguments, and because of numerous methodological weaknesses, should be approached with utmost caution.

A much more reliable, detailed and critical discussion of stoning among the Slavs was published in 1956 by Henryk Grajewski in his important monograph on death penalties in medieval Poland.[57] His survey demonstrates that there are only a few medieval textual sources that mention executions by stoning among the Slavs and that, based only on these laconic accounts, it is difficult to determine how frequently this form of punishment was practiced in the early medieval period in Poland. Nevertheless, Grajewski agrees with other scholars that stoning in the Slavic cultural milieu was a collective form of punishment which, because it was conducted by a mob, ensured that the family of the convict would not seek revenge upon a particular executioner.[58]

In 2006, the topic of stoning in early medieval Poland was taken up yet again by Paweł Gołdyn who, in addition to providing a thorough overview of relevant textual sources (some of which had been omitted by previous scholars), attempted to set it into a wider cross-cultural perspective and discussed similar practices in Bohemia and Prussia.[59]

In addition to the scholars mentioned above, Tadeusz Grabarczyk has also briefly discussed stoning in his more recent publication on death penalties in Poland, but his work is aimed for popular audience and as such does not provide any new or groundbreaking interpretations.[60]

In a number of my own works, I also have looked at the custom of stoning among the Slavs, but mainly from an archaeological perspective and without devoting too much attention to written sources.[61] To create a solid background for further discussion and interpretation, it is therefore necessary to take a closer look at the complete corpus of textual evidence for the practice of stoning in Poland in the Early Middle Ages.

Stoning is recorded in the work of Gallus Anonymus, who in his *Gesta Principum Polonorum*[62] describes a pagan revolt that took place in Poland in the first half of the eleventh century. He writes that the Slavs who converted back from Christianity to paganism rose against the bishops and priests and killed them with

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[56] Surowiecki 1824.

[57] Grajewski 1956.

[58] Grajewski 1956, p. 204. See also Gołdyn 2006, p. 128.

[59] Gołdyn 2006.

[60] Grabarczyk 2008, pp. 104–105.

[61] Gardeła 2011b; 2012c; 2015a.

[62] In Polish known as *Kronika polska*.

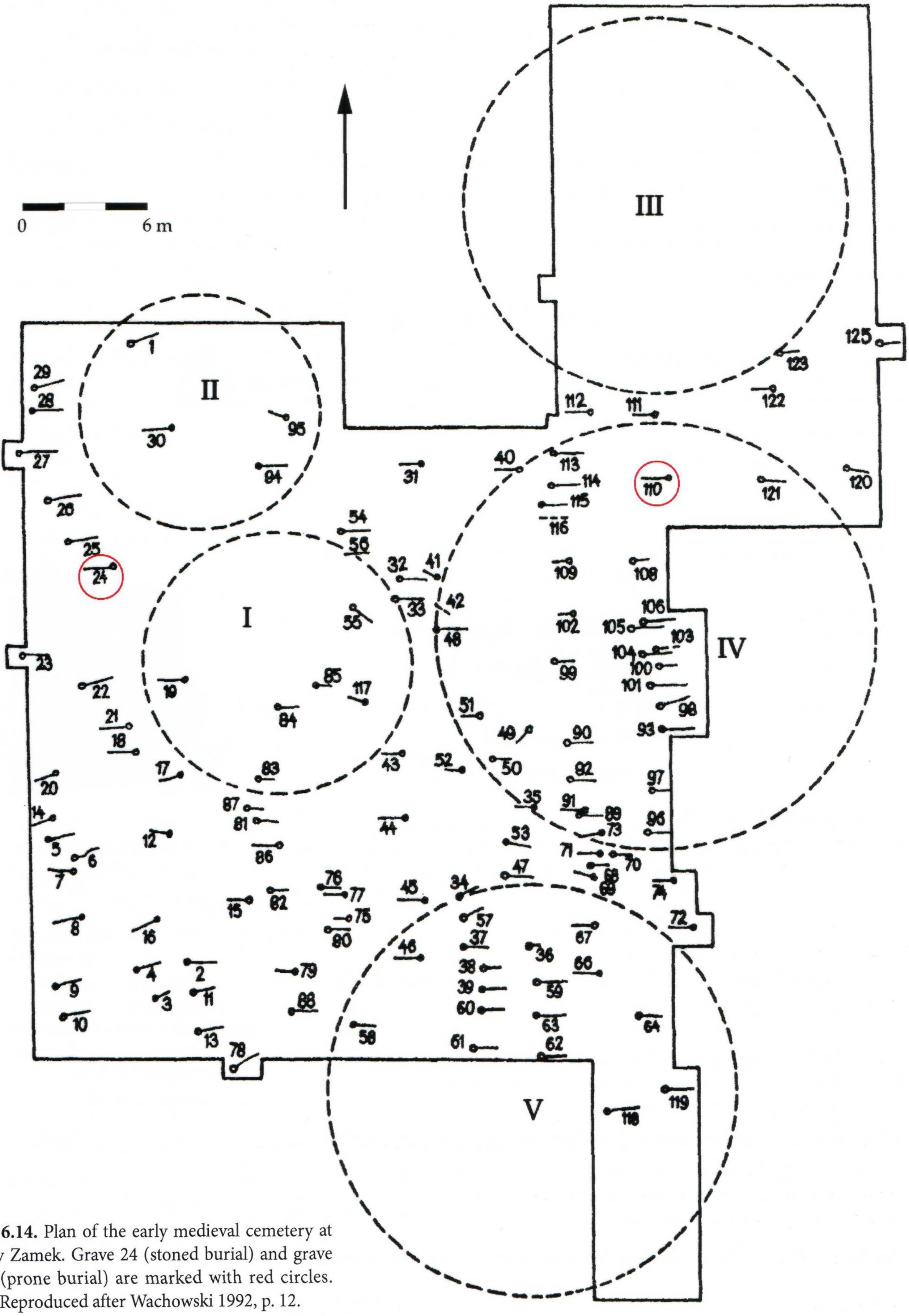
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Fig. 6.14. Plan of the early medieval cemetery at Stary Zamek. Grave 24 (stoned burial) and grave 110 (prone burial) are marked with red circles. Reproduced after Wachowski 1992, p. 12.

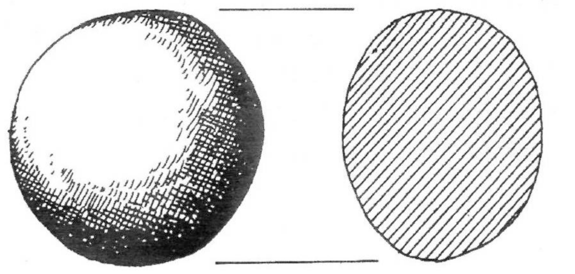

Fig. 6.15. Ball-shaped stone from grave 27/92 at Dziekanowice. After Wrzesińscy 1993, p. 168.

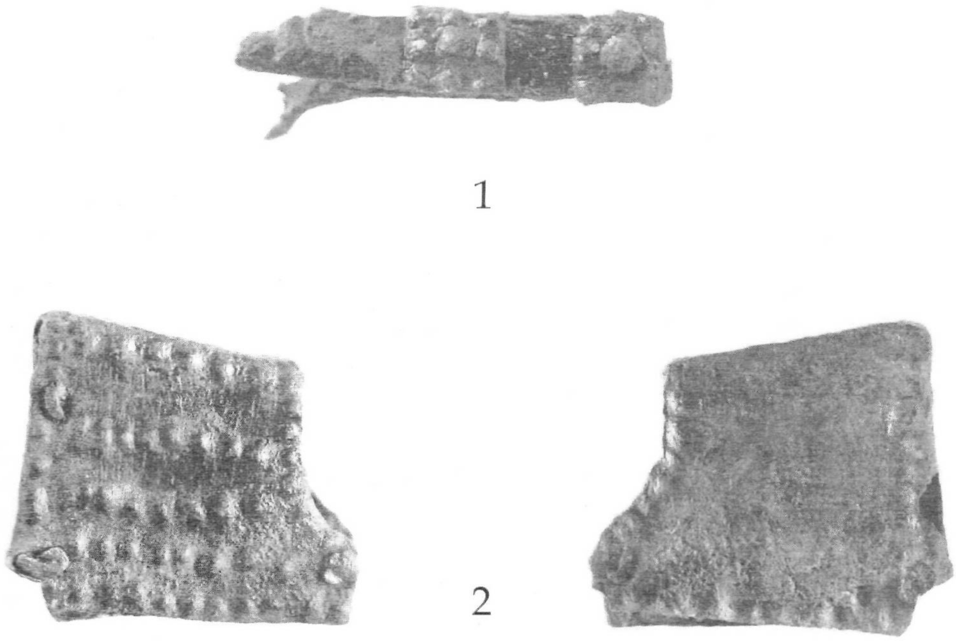

Fig. 6.16. Copper alloy knife fittings from grave 15 at Koninko. Reproduced after Stępnik 2009a, p. 285.

the use of swords and stones.[63] In the same passage, Gallus remarks that, for the Slavs, death by stoning was regarded as less honourable than death by the sword.[64]

Elsewhere in his chronicle, Gallus mentions an occasion when the commoners wanted to stone an emissary of a certain Sieciech, a nobleman who tried to usurp power in Poland.[65] In both cases, the act of stoning represents a form of collective violence directed against those who pose a threat to society or against those with whom the common folk disagreed.

What is more, the bishop Thietmar of Merseburg mentions stoning in his *Chronicon* while commenting on the brutal forms of punishment for women accused of harlotry in the time of Bolesław the Brave. In this case, however, Thietmar's remark about stoning should not be regarded as referring to Slavic forms of execution specifically, but is more of a commentary on how imprudent women should be treated according to the 'law of the Lord'. As we read in Thietmar's chronicle:

> If a woman was found to be a prostitute, moreover, she suffered a particularly wretched and shameful penalty. The skin around her genitals was cut off and this 'foreskin', if we may call it that, was hung on the door so that anyone who entered would see it and be more concerned and prudent in the future. The law of the Lord declares that such a woman should be stoned, and the rules of our ancestors would require her beheading.[66]

As for the North-Western Slavs, *Helmoldi Presbyteri Chronica Slavorum* mentions the stoning of Christian clergy during an Obodrite uprising in 1066.[67] Later in his chronicle, Helmold also writes about Christian clergy entering a holy grove in 1156 and destroying and burning various architectural features that stood there (i.e. gates and fences). He notes that the Christians were afraid of being attacked and stoned by pagans living in the area.[68] In addition to these examples, the stoning of Christians by the pagan Slavs is also recorded in *Ebbonis vita Ottonis*.[69]

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[63] Anonim tzw. Gall, *Kronika polska* I(19); Translation after Grodecki, Plezia 2008, pp. 42–43: 'Nadto jeszcze, porzucając wiarę katolicką – czego nie możemy wypowiedzieć bez płaczu i lamentu – podnieśli bunt przeciwko biskupom i kapłanom Bożym i niektórych z nich, jakoby w zaszczytniejszy sposób, mieczem zgładzili, a innych, jakoby rzekomo godnych lichszej śmierci, ukamienowali' / 'In addition to that, after abandoning Christian faith – a fact which we cannot mention without shedding tears in sorrow – they rose against the bishops and God's clergy; some of them they killed in an honourable way with the sword, while others who were less worthy they stoned to death' (Translation by Leszek Gardeła). See also Kostrzewski 1949, p. 490; Kuczkowski 2009, p. 14.

[64] Grajewski 1956, p. 205; Gołdyn 2006, p. 128.

[65] Grajewski 1956, p. 205; Gołdyn 2006, pp. 128–129.

[66] Thietmar of Merseburg, *Chronicon*, Book 8, Chapter 3; Translation after Warner 2001, pp. 362–363.

[67] Grajewski 1956, p. 205.

Grajewski argues that, because stoning does not occur in Polish legal accounts younger than the thirteenth century, it ceased to be practiced around that time. He observes, however, that stoning may have occasionally been performed against those who committed an act of treason against the state.[70] Gołdyn further adds that, in the second half of the thirteenth century, stoning was included in the first Polish law as a punishment for treason.[71]

Regarding comparative evidence from the areas bordering with early medieval Poland, it seems that stoning was also known among the Prussians. For example, the missionary Adalbert was attacked with stones when he tried to preach the Christian faith in Prussia.[72] The Bohemian chronicler Cosmas also mentions stoning as punishment for a man who poisoned Duke Rościsław.[73] Moreover, stoning seems to have been practiced as a form of punishment among the Hungarians, as recorded in *Annales seu cronici incliti regni Poloniae* by Jan Długosz, who describes the stoning of Buda and the stoning of Christians during a pagan revolt.[74] The latter description is an interesting parallel to the information about stoning Christians in Gallus Anonymous' *Gesta Principum Polonorum* and in *Helmoldi Presbyteri Chronica Slavorum*. Could it be that in the minds of the pagans, the representatives of Christian clergy were regarded as 'sorcerers', and this form of punishment chosen specifically to avoid any physical contact with them? This is impossible to prove, but as we shall see further below, stoning was the customary form of execution for malevolent magic workers in Old Norse accounts, and there are also some implications in textual sources that such individuals may have been regarded as immune to other types of weapons.

4. STONING IN LATE MEDIEVAL POLAND

Although the textual sources imply that executions by stoning had ceased to be performed in Poland by the end of the thirteenth century, based on archaeological evidence it can be argued that the practice of placing stones or other heavy objects on the dead did not in fact end in the early medieval period, but was continued in Poland in later times, albeit in slightly altered ways.

Several late examples of this custom have been discovered in Greater Poland, for example at Łekno (grave Ł19/13/96) and Tarnowo Pałuckie (grave T22/26/99), where a flat mid-sized stone and a brick tile were placed on the necks of the deceased (**Fig. 6.17** and **Fig. 6.18**).[75] Based on later ethnographic accounts, this peculiar funerary behaviour has been interpreted by Wyrwa as an apotropaic rite intended to prevent the (alleged) 'vampire' from eating its own clothes or body, which could cause harm to the living.[76] Although this interpretation is plausible, there is also an alternative possibility that the placement of bricks or tiles over the necks was an act intended to prevent the jaws of the dead from dropping. This would serve an aesthetic purpose at the funeral and have nothing to do with the fear of revenants.

Yet another peculiar variant of placing heavy objects in the head-area has been noted in a seventeenth-century cemetery at Fordon, Bydgoszcz in Kuyavian-Pomeranian Voivodeship. Here, the heads of the deceased were surrounded by vertically standing roof-tiles and the faces were also covered with tiles (**Fig. 6.19**). This practice, similar to the cases from Łekno and Tarnowo Pałuckie described above, has been interpreted by Wojciech

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[68] Helmold, *Helmoldi Presbyteri Chronica Slavorum*, Chapter 84; Translation after Matuszewski 1974, p. 331: 'Gdyśmy przyszli do owego gaju, miejsca nieczystego, napomniał nas biskup, byśmy odważnie zabrali się do niszczenia wspomnianego gaju. Sam zeskoczył z konia i strzaskał ozdobne wysady bram. Potem wszedłszy do przybytku na jedno miejsce wokół świętych drzew i z kupy drewna uczyniliśmy stos do palenia, choć nie bez obaw, by nas przypadkiem mieszkańcy nie zaskoczyli i nie obrzucili kamieniami' / 'When we came to that grove, an unholy place, the bishop warned us to bravely attempt its destruction. He jumped off his horse and destroyed the decorated gates. Then, he approached one of the holy trees and built a pyre out of wood. While doing all this, we were worried that some of the locals would stone us' (Translation by Leszek Gardeła). See also Gołdyn 2006, p. 129.

[69] Grajewski 1956, p. 205.

[70] Grajewski 1956, pp. 206–207. See also Gołdyn 2006, p. 130.

[71] Gołdyn 2006, p. 129.

[72] Gołdyn 2006, p. 129.

[73] Gołdyn 2006, p. 129.

[74] Gołdyn 2006, p. 129.

[75] Wyrwa 2008, pp. 54–56.

[76] Wyrwa 2008, p. 56.

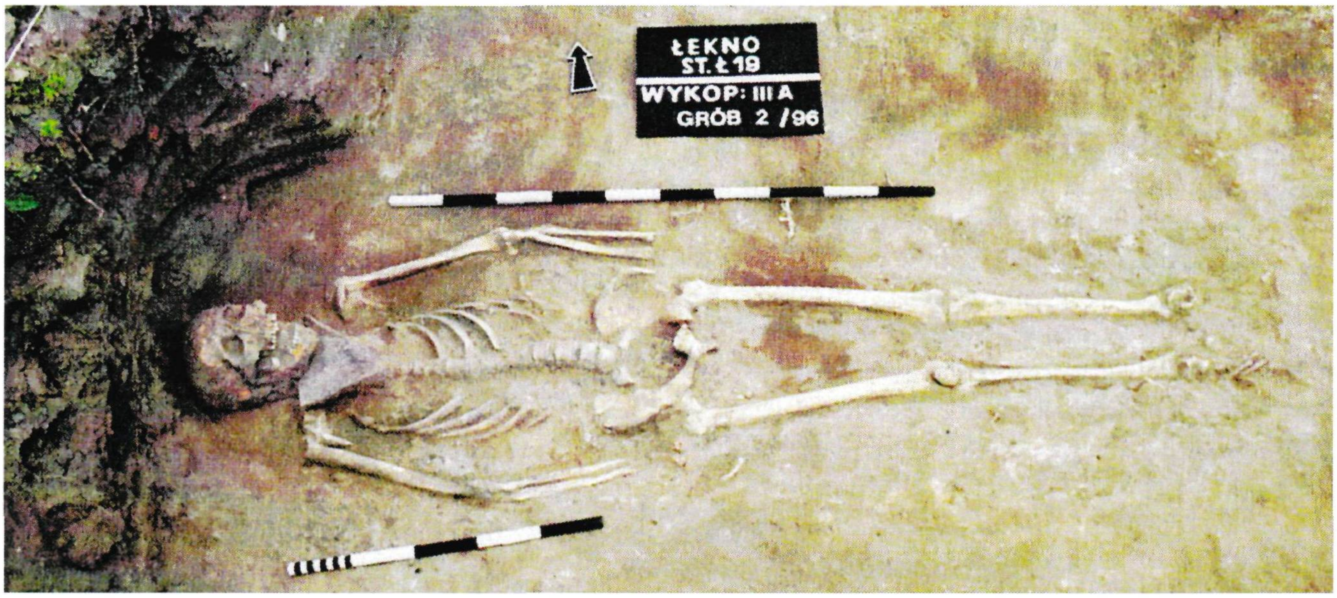

Fig. 6.17. Grave Ł19/13/96 from Łekno. After Wyrwa 2008, p. 54.

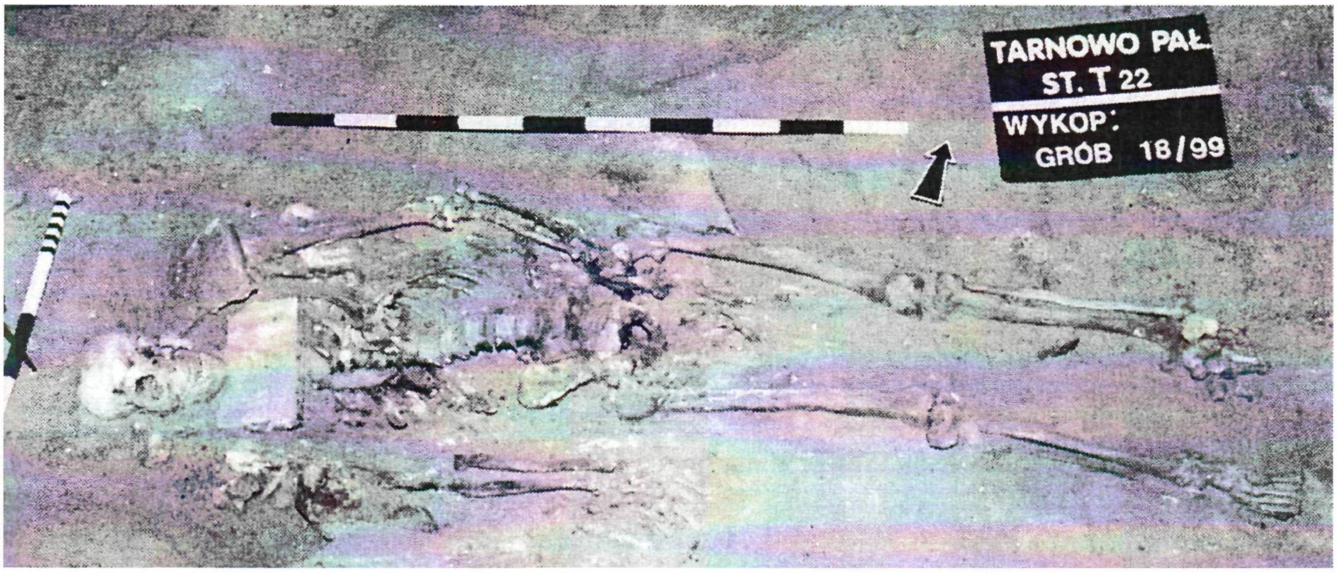

Fig. 6.18. Grave T22/26/99 from Tarnowo Pałuckie. After Wyrwa 2008, p. 55.

Siwak as an apotropaic ritual intended to prevent the dead from rising, but in fact could have had a purely practical purpose, such as to protect the heads from damage while backfilling the grave pit.[77]

An alternative and more sinister intention behind the use of stones can be seen in the case of a grave discovered at an early modern execution site at Miłków in Silesia. The grave, which was located close to the gallows, contained an elderly man (over 55 years old at the time of death). He was buried prone with a large stone on his skull.[78] The proximity of the gallows makes it clear that the grave belonged to a convict, or perhaps someone who had committed suicide, since, in early modern times, interring the bodies prone and covering them with stones was a typical way of burying someone who had taken their own life.[79]

Finally, it may also be worth noting that, in north-western Poland, in the late medieval cemetery in Gorzów

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[77] Information provided to the press by the archaeologist Wojciech Siwak.

[78] Duma 2010, p. 97.

[79] For further examples, see Duma 2010, p. 77.

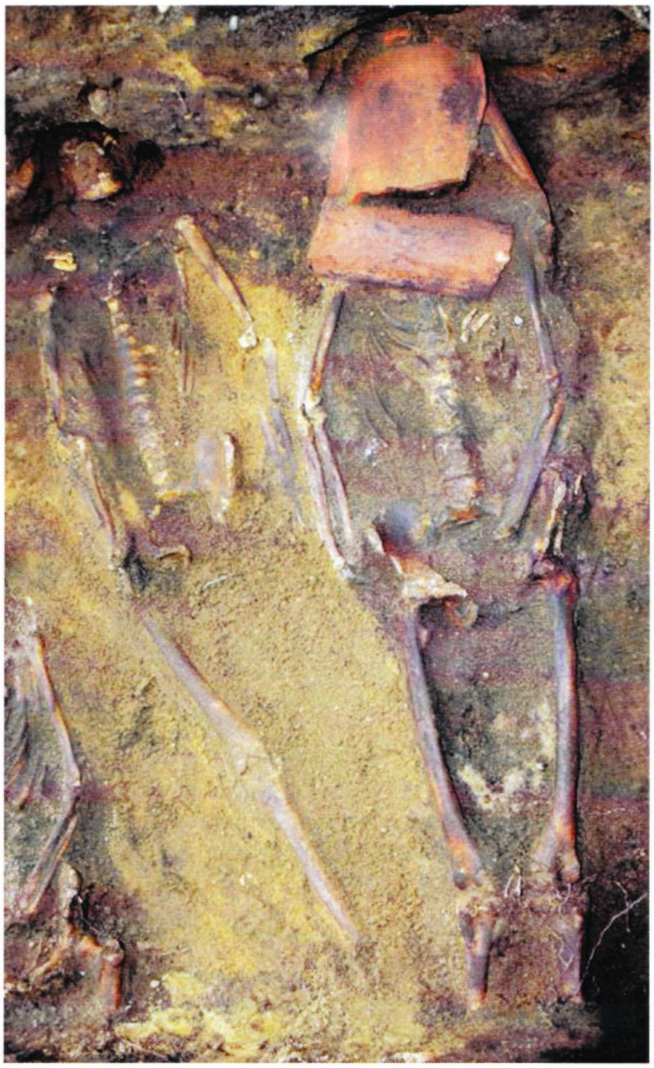

Fig. 6.19. Graves with tiles from Fordon. Photo by Wojciech Siwak.

Wielkopolski, a young (aged 4–5) child's grave (grave 64) was found to include two roof tiles – one lying on the child's chest and the other to the right of its skull (**Fig. 6.20**).[80] It is unlikely that the tiles ended up in the grave as a result of hasty backfilling or due to post-depositional processes; their placement seems to have been intentional. Pytlak considers this grave to belong to a child who was feared to become a revenant.[81] Child revenants, known as *porońce* or *stradcze*, are indeed present in Slavic folklore and in early modern times dead newborns were particularly feared of turning into such beings.[82] However, like the graves mentioned above, this find could also be interpreted in other ways; and the roof tile need not have an apotropaic meaning.

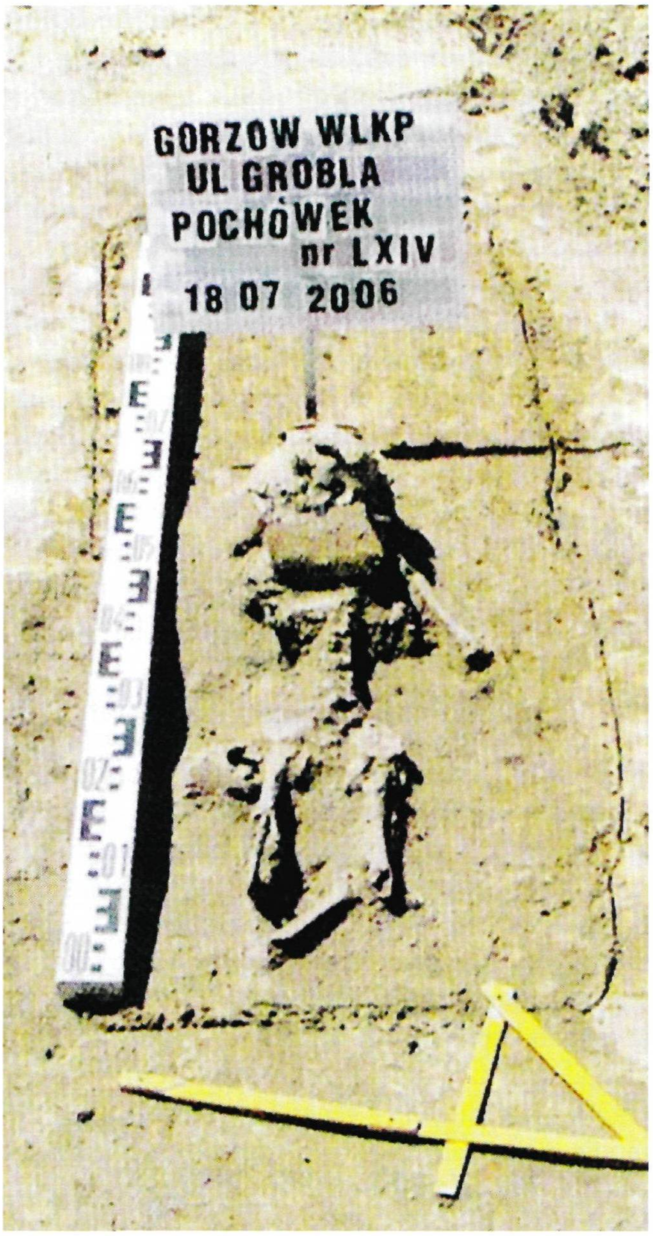

Fig. 6.20. Grave 64 from Gorzów Wielkopolski. After Pytlak 2009, p. 38.

5. COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVES

We have now discussed archaeological and textual evidence for the practice of stoning and placing stones on the dead among the early and late medieval Slavs in Poland. However, as I have outlined in the introduction to this chapter, punishment by stoning was well known among various other Indo-European societies, and in some parts of the world it is still performed today. Surveys of textual sources dating from the Middle Ages show that the act of stoning or burying people under stones had multiple meanings, and that it is unjustified to interpret it only as an apotropaic measure against revenants, as many scholars have done in the case of archaeological finds from Poland. According to Anglo-Saxon, Frankish, Saxon and West-Nordic law, stoning was a punishment for theft.[83] In Old Norse sagas, stoning is a punishment for performing malevolent *seiðr* magic,[84] and in medieval Swedish law, stoning was a punishment for murder (for example of a husband) or sorcery.[85]

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[80] Pytlak 2009, pp. 38–39, 141.

[81] Pytlak 2009, p. 39.

[82] Szyjewski 2003, p. 195; see also Falis 2008; 2013, pp. 32–33.

Below, we shall take a closer look at selected examples of the practice of stoning in Viking Age Scandinavia and Iceland, and we will also examine the different expressions of this custom in Anglo-Saxon England. These areas have been chosen for comparison with the Slavic material specifically because stoning is well attested in their extant textual sources, and because their archaeological materials have recently been subjected to very thorough interdisciplinary analysis.[86]

Stoning and stoned burials in the Viking world

The motif of using stones in executions occurs in three Old Norse sagas (*Laxdœla saga*, *Gísla saga Súrssonar* and *Eyrbyggja saga*), all of which belong to the genre of *Íslendingasögur*, also known as the 'Sagas of Icelanders' or 'Family sagas'. These sources usually date from the thirteenth century, but claim to describe authentic events that took place in the Viking Age, mostly in Iceland, but also in other parts of the Viking world. The reliability of the sagas is a matter of constant debate among scholars, but there is a general consensus that some motifs – especially those pertaining to pre-Christian practices – do find some basis in reality. In recent years, a number of scholars have shown that there are indeed interesting overlaps between accounts included in the sagas and archaeological materials from Viking Age Scandinavia and Iceland.[87]

Laxdœla saga is particularly rich in detail with regard to the practice of stoning.[88] Among other things, this saga describes the complicated lives and deeds of a Hebridean family of sorcerers, who migrated to Iceland and engaged in the practice of malevolent *seiðr* magic. The head of the family is a man named Kotkell, who is married to a woman named Gríma. They have two sons, Hallbjǫrn slíkisteinsauga and Stígandi. While living in Iceland, the sorcerers are accused of committing acts of theft and murder and, as a result, the local population chases and kills them using stones.[89] The passage describing their execution and subsequent burial is rich in detail and deserves to be cited in full:

> Þeir Ólafr ok Hrutr fara með fimmtán menn. En er þau Kotkell sjá mannareið at bœ sínum, þá taka þau undan í fjall upp. Þar varð Hallbjǫrn slíkisteinsauga tekinn ok dreginn belgr á hǫfuð honum; þegar váru þá fengnir menn til gæzlu við hann, en sumir sóttu eptir þeim Kotkatli ok Grímu ok Stíganda upp á fjallit. Þau Kotkell ok Gríma urðu áhend á hálsinum milli Haukadals ok Laxárdals; váru þau þar barið grjóti í hel, ok var þar gǫr at þeim dys ór grjóti, ok sér þess merki, ok heitir þar Skrattavarði. Stígandi tók undan suðr af hálsinum til Haukadals, ok þar hvarf hann þeim. Hrutr ok synir hans fóru til sjávar með Hallbjǫrn. Þeir settu fram skip ok reru frá landi með hann; siðan tóku þeir belg af hǫfði honum, en bundu stein við hálsinn (...) Siðan drekkðu þeir honum ok reru til lands.[90]
>
> Ólafr and Hrutr set out with fifteen others, but when Kotkell and his family saw riders approaching they fled towards the mountains. Hallbjǫrn slíkisteinsauga was the first to be caught, and a sack was pulled over his head. Several men were left behind to guard him while the others went after Kotkell, Gríma and Stígandi. Kotkell and Gríma were taken on the ridge between Haukadal and Laxárdal. They were stoned to death and their bodies placed in a shallow grave heaped with stones, the remains of which are still visible. It is called *Skrattavarði*. Stígandi managed to make it through the pass and into Haukadal, where they lost sight of him. Hrutr and his sons rowed out to sea with Hallbjǫrn. They removed the sack and tied a stone about his neck (...) They then drowned him and rowed back to shore.[91]

As mentioned later in the saga, Kotkell's second son – Stígandi – managed to escape and remained in hiding for a while but he was soon caught by the pursuers. Upon his execution, a sack was pulled over his head and he was stoned to death. Like his parents, his body was also covered with stones. In addition to providing a very detailed description of the execution by stoning, the account in *Laxdœla saga* also suggests that a belief in the evil eye existed among the Viking Age Scandinavians

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[83] Ström 1942, p. 104.

[84] Ström 1942, p. 104; Gardeła 2016d, pp. 79–88.

[85] Ström 1942, p. 104.

[86] See, for example, Reynolds 2009; Gardeła 2010b; 2011b; 2012b; 2012c; 2013c.

[87] See, for example, Price 2002; Byock 2014; Gardeła 2016d.

[88] Einar Ól. Sveinsson 1934.

[89] The deeds of Kotkell and Gríma are discussed in further detail in Gardeła 2009, pp. 289–291; 2010b, pp. 277–278.

[90] *Laxdœla saga* (ch. 37); Text after Einar Ól. Sveinsson 1934, pp. 106–107

[91] *Laxdœla saga* (ch. 37); Translation after Kunz 2000, p. 341, with my amendments.

– this would explain the practice of pulling a sack over the head of the convict.[92]

Another example of stoning on a mountain ridge is recorded in *Gísla saga Súrssonar.* In this account, a woman named Auðbjǫrg and a sorcerer named Þorgrímr nef are seized and executed for committing murder. As we read in the saga:

> En er Bǫrkr frétti þessi fákynstr, þá ferr hann upp á Annmarkastaði ok lætr taka Auðbjǫrgu ok ferr með hana út á Saltnes ok berr hana grjóti í hel. Ok er þetta er liðit, ferr Gísli heiman ok kemr á Nefsstaði ok tekr Þórgrím nef hǫndum ok fœrir á Saltnes, ok er dreginn belgr á hǫfuð honum, ok er barðr grjóti til bana ok er kasaðr hjá systur sinni, á hryggnum milli Haukadals ok Meðaldals.[93]
>
> And when Bǫrkr received news of the disaster, he went up to Annmarkastaðir and had Auðbjǫrg seized and took her out to Saltnes and stoned her to death. And when this happened, Gísli left his home and went to Nefsstaðir, caught Þórgrimr nef and took him to Saltnes where a sack was pulled over his head and he was stoned to death and buried under a heap of stones, beside his sister, on the ridge between Haukadal and Meðaldal.[94]

In both *Laxdœla saga* and *Gísla saga Súrssonar*, choosing a mountain ridge to conduct the act of stoning does not seem to have been coincidental. The liminal nature of mountain ridges, as places 'suspended' between heaven and earth even further emphasises the suspicious and dangerous nature of the individuals dealing with magic. Executing someone in such a secluded location not only marks the convict as a social outcast, however, but also serves a prophylactic purpose, since the covering of the body with stones was thought to prevent it from returning to the world of the living in the form of a revenant.[95]

A similar idea may have motivated stoning on beaches, which also seem to have been conceptualised as places between the worlds of land and sea. As Folke Ström observed, according to Swedish and Norwegian law certain kinds of criminals should be buried on a shore washed by the tide.[96] Apparently, this custom also seems to have been intended to prevent the deceased from becoming a revenant.

One example of stoning on a beach as a punishment for performing sorcery is recorded in *Eyrbyggja saga.* Part of the saga describes the story of a man named Oddr, who is accused of cutting off a woman's arm. He hides in the house of his mother, Katla, who is versed in magic, and who manages to fool her son's pursuers by creating a series of illusions. However, when another sorceress enters the house and breaks Katla's distaff (probably a kind of magic staff that made the illusions possible),[97] Oddr is immediately found and executed by hanging. Soon his mother is also violently executed. The saga does not provide many details about the killing, however, merely noting that:

> Eptir þat bǫrðu þeir Kǫtlu grjóti í hel þar undir hǫfðanum.[98]
>
> After that they stoned Katla to death under the promontory.[99]

In addition to the examples discussed above, Old Norse literature contains several other descriptions of stones being used in a ritual context. For example, in *Gísla saga Súrssonar*, a stone is thrown into a boat grave belonging to man named Þorgrímr, who had died a bad death by being murdered in his bed:

> Ok er buit er at lykja hauginn, þá gengr Gísli til óssins ok tekr upp stein einn, svá mikinn sem bjarg væri, ok leggr í skipit, svá at nær þótti hvert tré hrøkkva fyrir, en brakaði mjǫk í skipinu, ok mælti: "Eigi kann ek skip at festa, ef þetta tekr veðr upp." Þat var nǫkkurra manna mál, at eigi þótti allólíkt fara því, er Þorgrímr hafði gǫrt við Véstein, er hann rœddi um helskóna.[100]
>
> When the mound had been sealed, Gísli walked to the mouth of the river and lifted a stone so heavy it was more like a boulder. He dropped it into the boat with such a resounding crash that almost every plank of wood gave way. "If the weather shifts this", he said, "then I don't know how to fasten a boat." Some people remarked that this was not unlike what Þorgrímr had done with Véstein when he spoke of Hel-shoes.[101]

Þorgrímr was not a sorcerer, as was the case with other stoned individuals in the passages examined above, but the throwing of a stone onto the boat[102] can nevertheless be regarded as a preventive measure against the undesired *post-mortem* activity of a man who had died a bad death.

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[92] For cross-cultural discussions on the evil eye, see Dundes 1991. For a discussion of the evil eye motif among the Viking Age Scandinavians, see Lassen 2003; Gardeła 2013c, pp. 105–107.

[93] *Gísla saga Súrssonar* (ch. 19); Text after Björn K. Þórólfsson, Guðni Jónsson 1943, p. 60.

[94] *Gísla saga Súrssonar* (ch. 19); My translation.

[95] Ström 1942, p. 107.

[96] Ström 1942, p. 107.

[97] For more details about this passage, see Dillmann 1982; Gardeła 2016d, pp. 181–183.

[98] *Eyrbyggja saga* (ch. 20); Text after Einar Ól. Sveinsson, Matthias Þórðarson 1935, p. 54.

[99] *Eyrbyggja saga* (ch. 20); My translation.

[100] *Gísla saga Súrssonar* (ch. 17); Text after Björn K. Þórólfsson, Guðni Jónsson 1943, p. 56.

[101] *Gísla saga Súrssonar* (ch. 17); Translation after Regal 2000, p. 523, with my amendments.

Further ambiguous examples of throwing stones at people are recorded in *Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar* (ch. 78), and in *Egils saga Skalla-Grímssonar* (ch. 40). In the former, the hero of the saga, Grettir, hurled a stone down onto a boat to hit a sorceress named Þuriðr, who had been uttering curses against him. The stone did not kill the woman, however, so its use cannot be regarded as an act of stoning in the strict sense. *Egils saga Skalla-Grímssonar* (ch. 40) describes a curious event in which a woman named Þorgerðr Brák, who has fostered the saga protagonist, Egill, is chased by his father and jumps from the headland into the sea. The father casts a boulder after her, which gets stuck between the woman's shoulder blades and kills her. Again, this is not a classic example of stoning, but a result of the uncontrolled fury of Egill's father, which causes him to spontaneously pick up a random object within his reach and use it to kill the woman who enraged him. It must be noted, however, that Þorgerðr is described in the saga as being versed in magic, and the place where she dies is a liminal location. In a sense, therefore, the narrative pattern here seems to resemble more typical accounts of stoning sorcerers from other Old Norse sagas (e.g. *Eyrbyggja saga*, *Gísla saga Súrssonar*, *Laxdœla saga*). It might be worth noting that this intriguing episode is well known among the Icelanders, and in today's Borgarnes there is a special monument commemorating Þorgerðr near the alleged place of her death.

In attempting to use these Old Norse sources to interpret archaeological evidence, we should remember that the practice of stoning may not always be accompanied by the act of laying stones on people who have died. When stoned corpses are discovered, whether in Scandinavia, Iceland, Poland or elsewhere, it is often impossible to determine whether or not the buried individuals were actually executed by stoning or whether the stones were just placed over their bodies during the funeral. However, despite these problems of interpretation, there are many conceptual connections between the act of stoning and the practice of placing stones over the bodies of the deceased. As mentioned above, in Old Norse sagas, people who are executed by stoning are *also* buried under stones, sometimes on the same spot. The Old Norse term used for this practice of covering with stones is *kasa* or *dysja* and as Folke Ström observed:

> This treatment was accorded, however, not only to the corpses of criminals who had been stoned to death, but also to certain other categories of dead persons, chiefly evil-doers, people who had practiced witchcraft or in other ways given evidence of an evil character and been deprived of their lives in a way corresponding to social disgrace. The opposite of *dysja* and *kasa* was the burial in a cairn (*haugr*), which was accorded persons of unblemished repute.[103]

Having reviewed the textual sources describing the practice of stoning in Old Norse societies,[104] we can now examine the most representative archaeological examples of stoned burials from Viking Age Scandinavia and Iceland.

Stoned burials in Viking Age Denmark

The double grave from Gerdrup in Sjælland, Denmark, which was discovered in 1981, is probably the most remarkable of all graves with stones placed directly on the deceased.[105] It held the remains of two adult individuals, a male and a female. The female's body was covered with two large stones – one on the chest and the other on the right leg (**Fig. 6.21**, **Fig. 6.22** and **Fig. 6.23**). At her waist lay an iron knife, as well as a small needlecase made of bone with an iron pin inside. Additionally, by the woman's leg was a long iron spearhead, of a type that is relatively unusual for Denmark (Jan Petersen's type E).[106] Between the bodies of the deceased were fragments of sheep crania, perhaps from food or sacrificed animals, and the man also had a small knife on his chest. Anthropological analysis of the man's skeletal remains has revealed that he probably died by hanging, as suggested by his twisted cervical vertebrae.[107] The Gerdrup grave has recently been

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[102] Stones have been found in several boat graves in the Viking world, for example in Kaupang, Oseberg, Scar and Westness – for further details, see Graham-Campbell, Batey 1998, pp. 135–140, 147; Gardeła 2012c, pp. 132–133.

[103] Ström 1942, p. 108.

[104] For a more thorough discussion, see Gardeła 2012c, pp. 121–141.

[105] For early studies and discussions on the Gerdrup grave, see Christensen 1981; 1997; Bennike, Christensen 1983; Andersen 1995, p. 98.

[106] The closest parallels to this spear are known from Hedeby – see Arents, Eisenschmidt 2010, pp. 330, 338.

[107] Bennike, Christensen 1983; Christensen 1997.

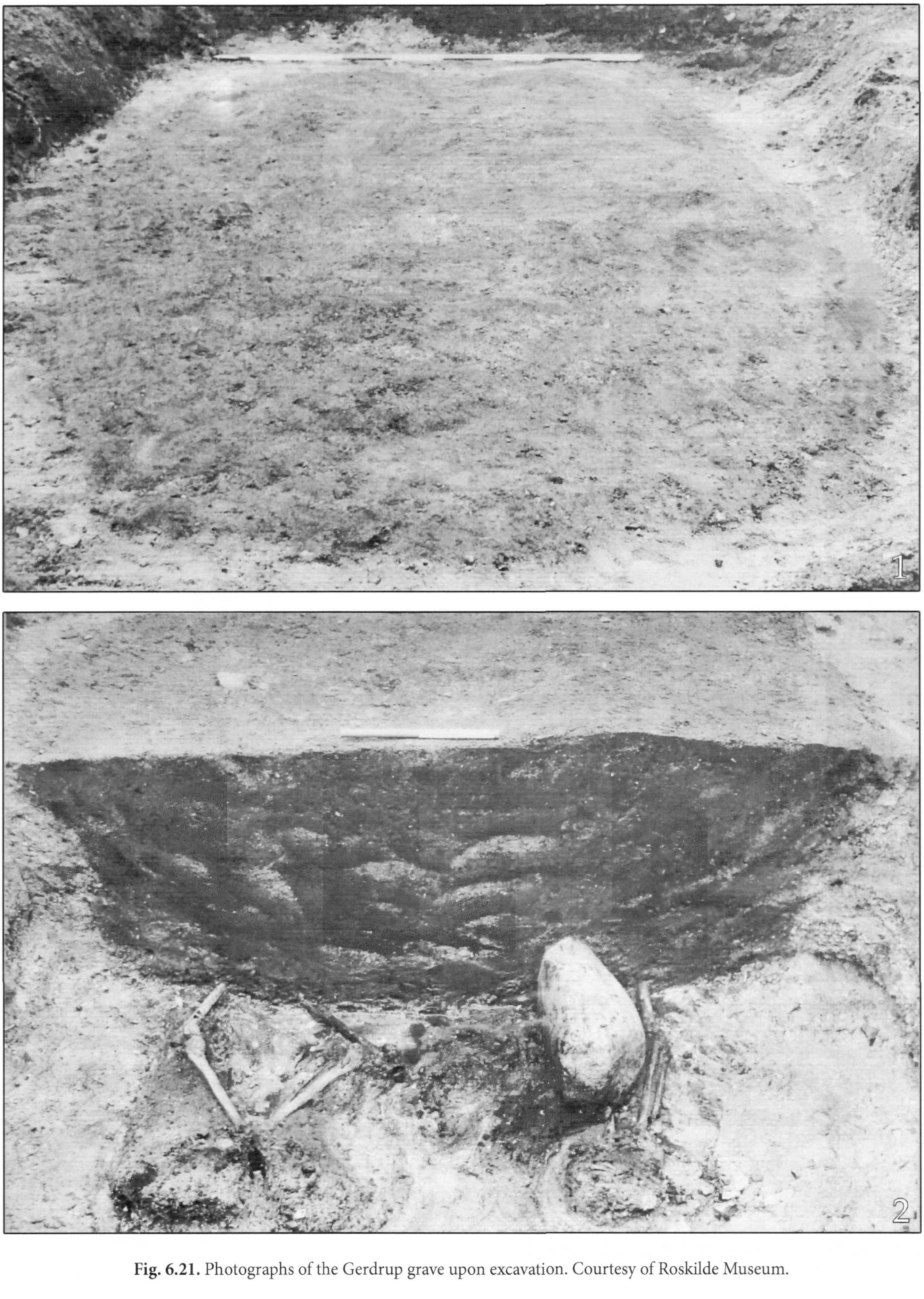

Fig. 6.21. Photographs of the Gerdrup grave upon excavation. Courtesy of Roskilde Museum.

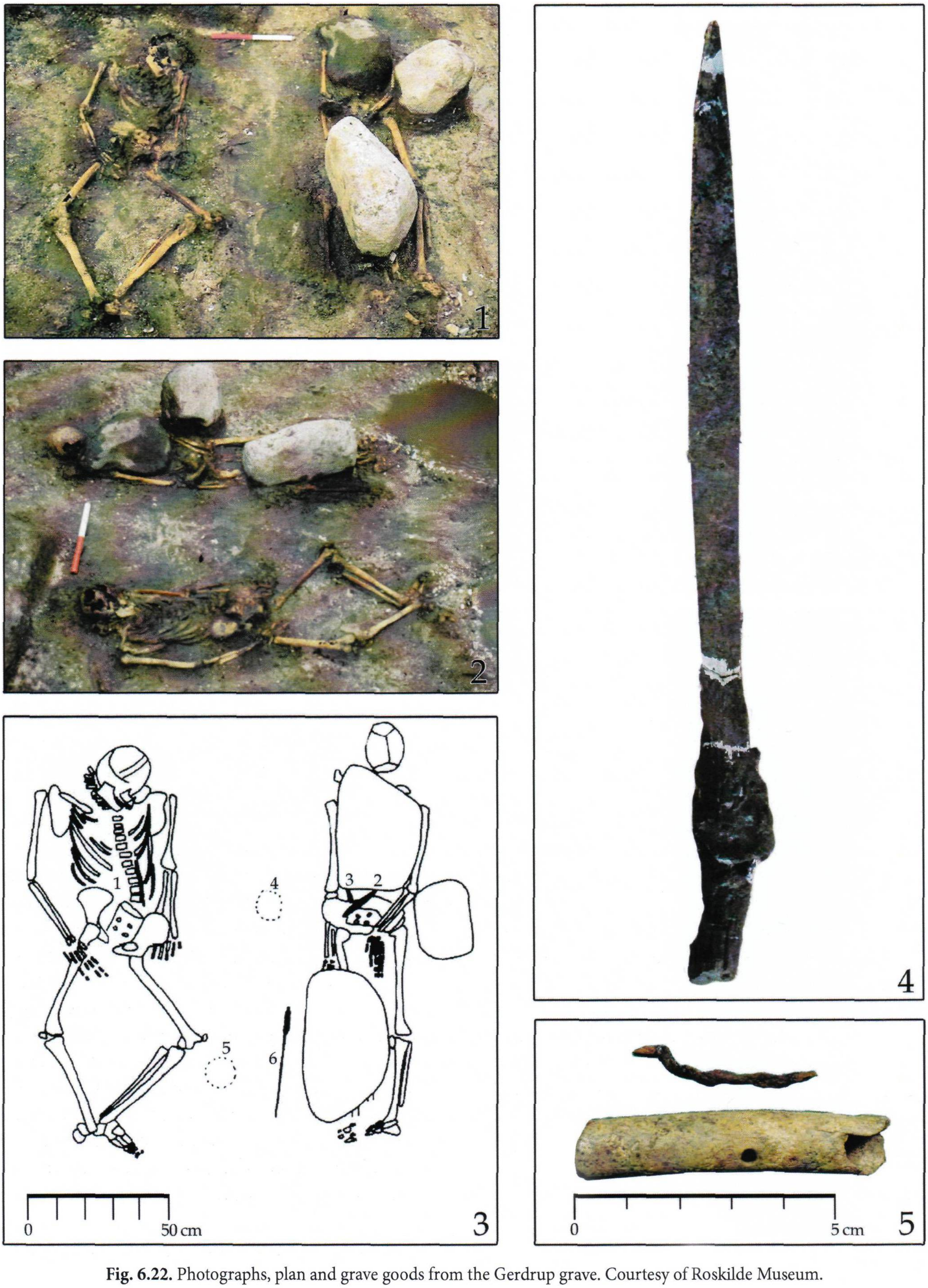
1
2
1
4
3 2
5
6
0
50 cm
3
4
0
5 cm
5

Fig. 6.22. Photographs, plan and grave goods from the Gerdrup grave. Courtesy of Roskilde Museum.

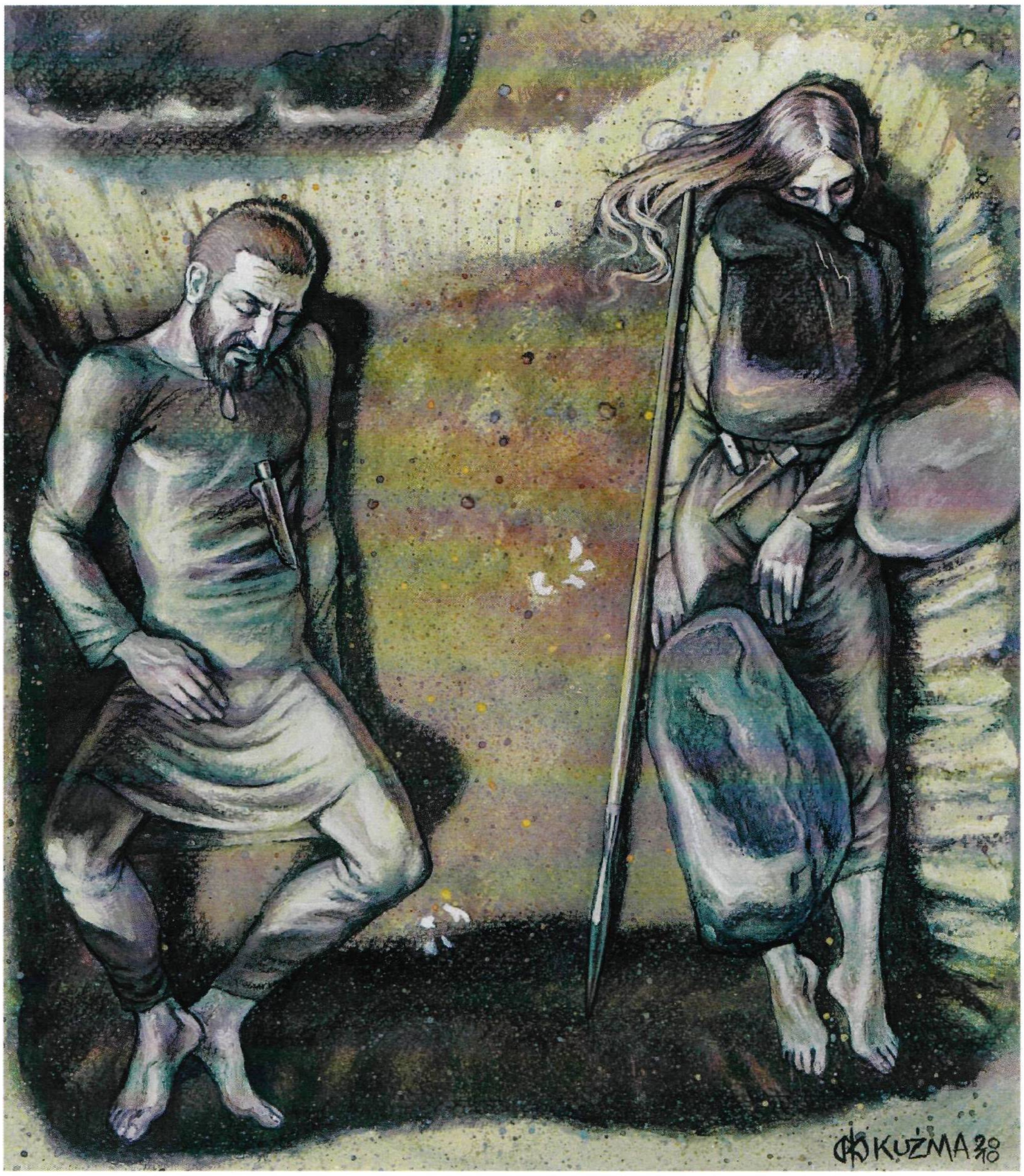

Fig. 6.23. Reconstruction of the Gerdrup grave. Illustration by Mirosław Kuźma. Copyright by Leszek Gardeła and Mirosław Kuźma.

discussed in numerous publications; I interpret it as belonging to a female ritual specialist who perhaps used the spear not as an ordinary weapon but as a special kind of magic staff.[108] The man buried at the woman's side may have been her slave[109] or alternatively a criminal who was violently executed for his mischief. According to Kari Ellen Gade, hanging in medieval Scandinavia was a penalty for treason, insolence, murder and offences of a sexual nature like seduction, abduction or adultery.[110] In some instances, hanging was also a punishment for people who committed acts of theft, marauding or plundering.

Another interesting example of a grave with stones placed directly over the dead was discovered in a cemetery at Trekroner-Grydehøj in Sjælland, Denmark (**Fig. 6.24** and **Fig. 6.25**).[111] The cemetery was located on a small hill. This site appears to have been used for the burial of the dead for a very long time, as shown by the remains of graves dating from the Neolithic period. In the Viking Age, the dead buried in this cemetery were either cremated or inhumed, and occasionally accompanied by various grave goods and animals. Grave A505 was the most remarkable and lavishly furnished of all the graves discovered at this site. It consisted of a relatively deep pit, in which

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[108] Gardeła 2016d, pp. 82–84.

[109] Christensen 1997.

[110] Gade 1985.

[111] Ulriksen 2011; Gardeła 2012b, pp. 390–392; 2012c; 2013c, pp. 117–118, 133; 2013d, pp. 282–284.

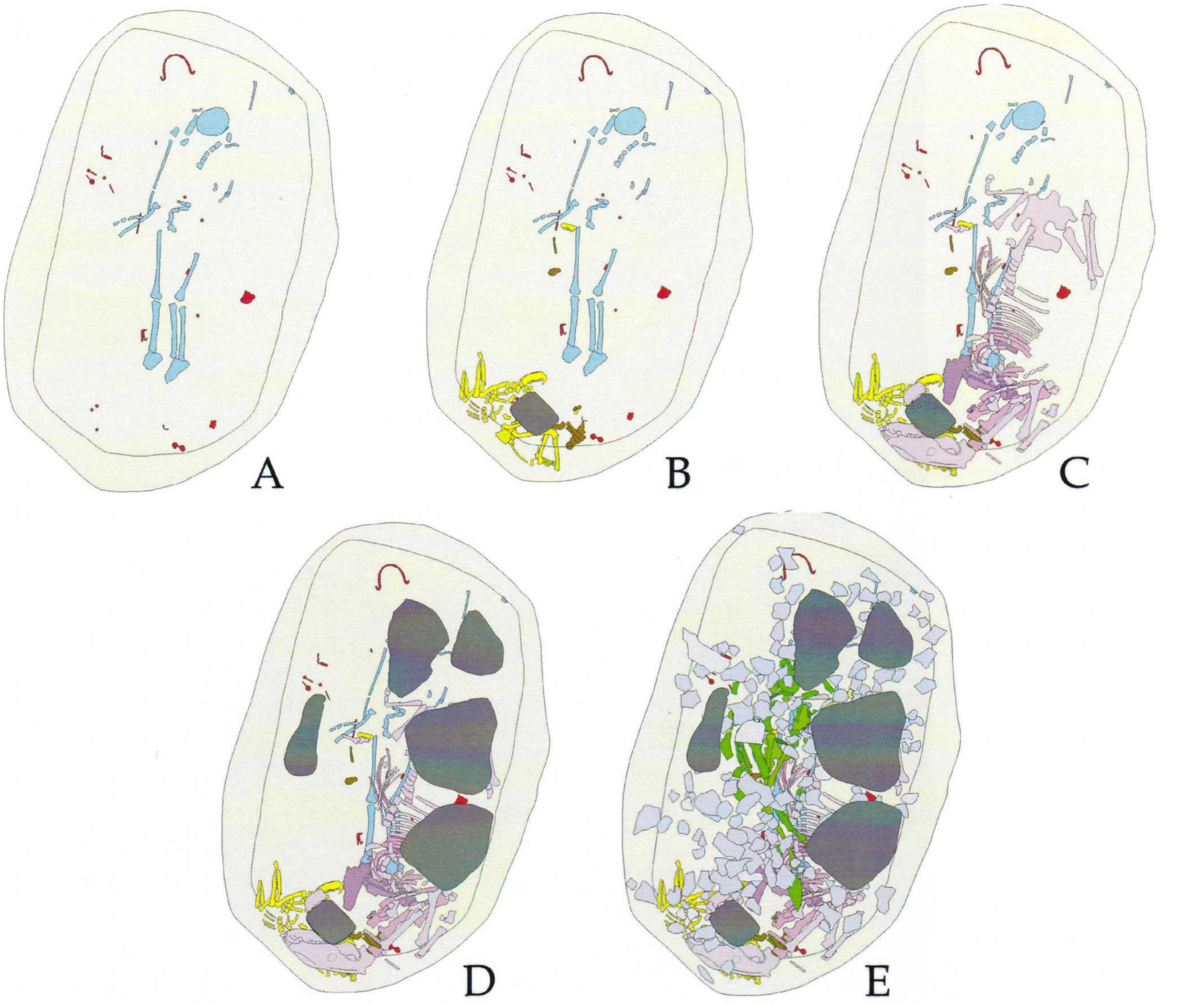

Fig. 6.24. Plans of grave A505 from Trekroner-Grydehøj showing the different layers of stones. Courtesy of Jens Ulriksen.

a woman who had died at the age of 25–30 was laid in a supine position. Her body was covered with that of a horse, and a bisected dog was placed at her feet. The woman was also accompanied by a wide array of objects, including a chest with metal fittings, a bucket, and three knives. The most remarkable object in this grave, however, was an copper alloy item with an iron tip resembling an arrowhead or a spearhead of very complex manufacture (**Fig. 6.26**). This curious find has been interpreted as a kind of magic staff, perhaps associated with the practice of *seiðr* magic.[112] Based on the types of objects buried with the woman, her grave can be dated to the ninth century. After the cadaver and its various accompanying items had been placed in the grave, a range of very peculiar acts were conducted. The woman's body and those of the animals were covered with large stones (interestingly, one of the stones was placed *over* the woman's head) and numerous smaller stones were thrown into the grave. It is possible that this part of the funeral represented a kind of *post-mortem* act of stoning, perhaps conducted collectively by the local community. Afterwards the pit was backfilled. At some later point in time, the grave was reopened and the disarticulated remains of two adult individuals were buried in a pit located directly above the original interment. The intention behind this act is unclear – the human remains may have been relatives of the woman buried previously, or they may belong to human sacrifices. It is also possible that what was buried in

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[112] Ulriksen 2011, pp. 175, 178, 193, 217; Gardeła 2016d, pp. 84–88, 278–279.

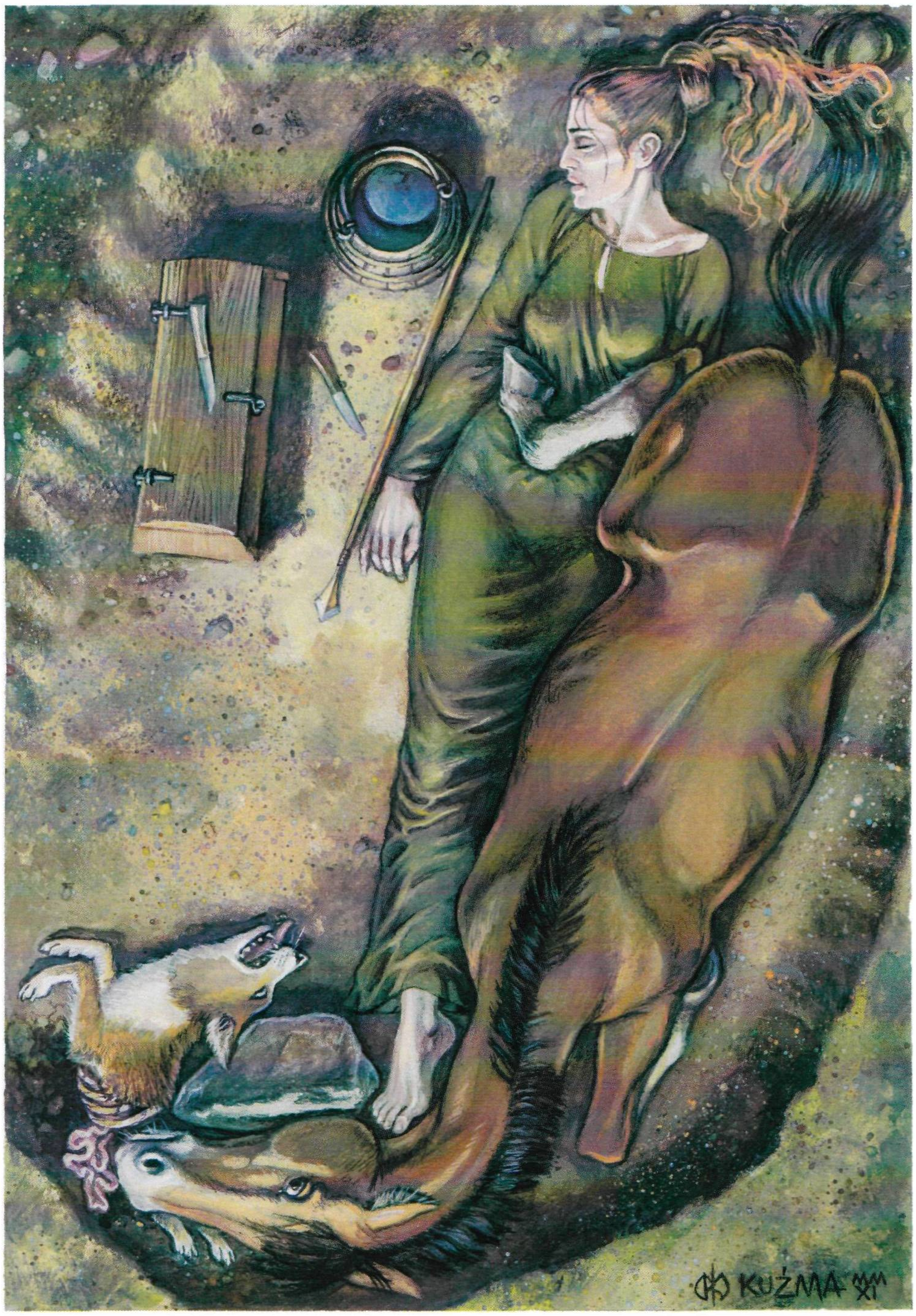

Fig. 6.25. Artistic reconstruction of grave A505 from Trekroner-Grydehøj. Illustration by Mirosław Kuźma. Copyright by Leszek Gardeła and Mirosław Kuźma.

the pit were not fleshed and disarticulated body parts but bones that had been removed from another grave and reburied. It is not easy to interpret this complex grave, but given that the woman was interred with a unique copper-alloy object that may have functioned as a staff, and that her body was covered with stones, there is a very strong possibility that she was a magic practitioner, similar to the woman buried at Gerdrup.

In Chapter 4, I discussed grave P from the Viking Age cemetery at Bogøvej, Langeland, in which a man had been buried in a prone position with several stones covering his body.[113] This is a very exceptional case in Viking Age Scandinavia and, to my knowledge, represents the only instance where a prone burial coincides with stoning. The site at Bogøvej, however, has several other examples of graves in which stones were placed directly over the deceased. In these graves, the stones lay on various parts of the bodies, including the chest or back (graves AV, C, P, Y), pelvis (grave Y) and legs (grave AK) (**Fig. 6.27**). It is interesting to note,

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[113] Grøn, Krag, Bennike 1994, pp. 14–15.

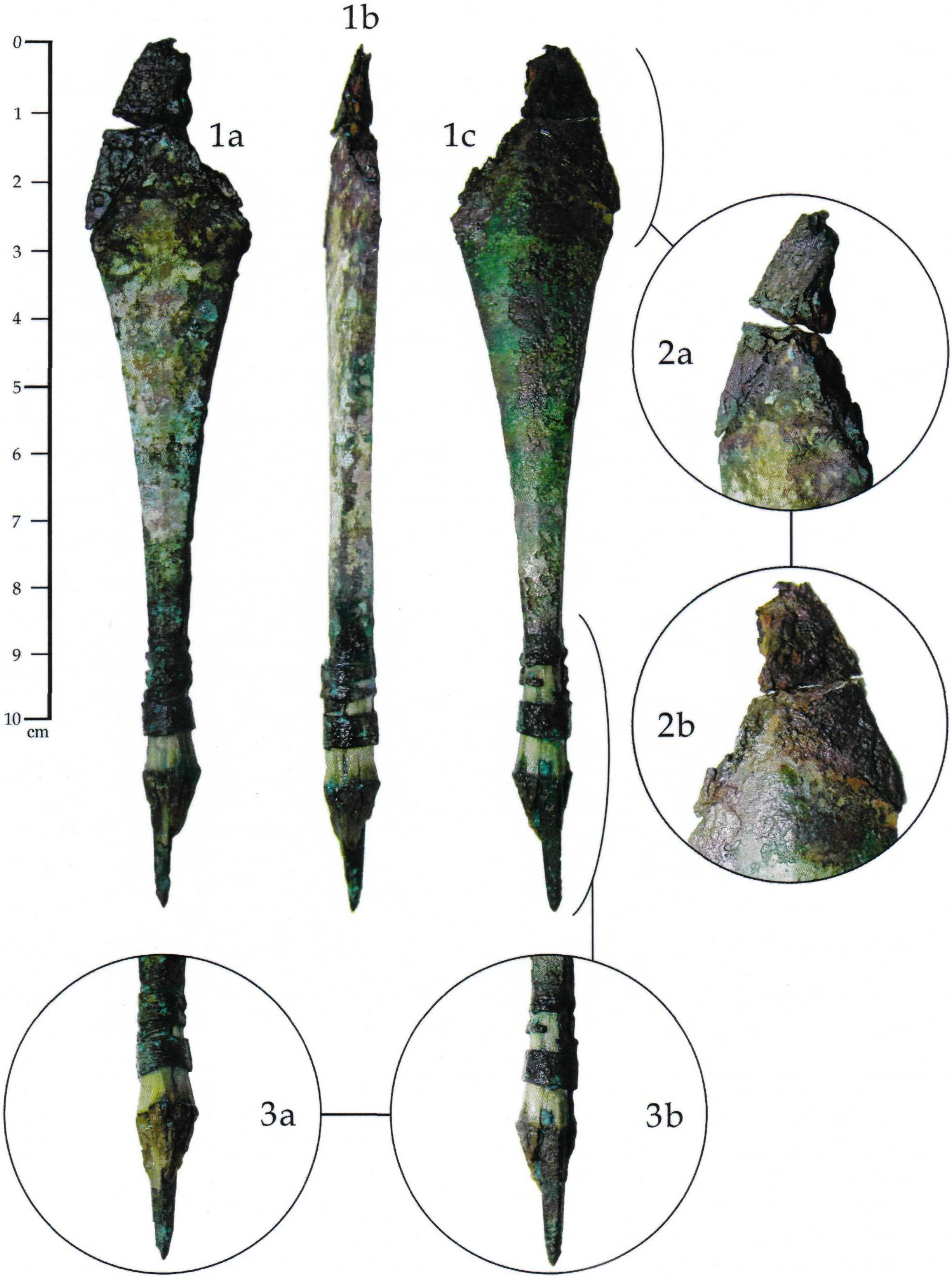
0
1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
cm
1a
1b
1c
2a
2b
3a
3b

Fig. 6.26. Copper alloy object with an iron tip, probably used as a magic staff. Collections of Roskilde Museum. All photographs by Leszek Gardeła.

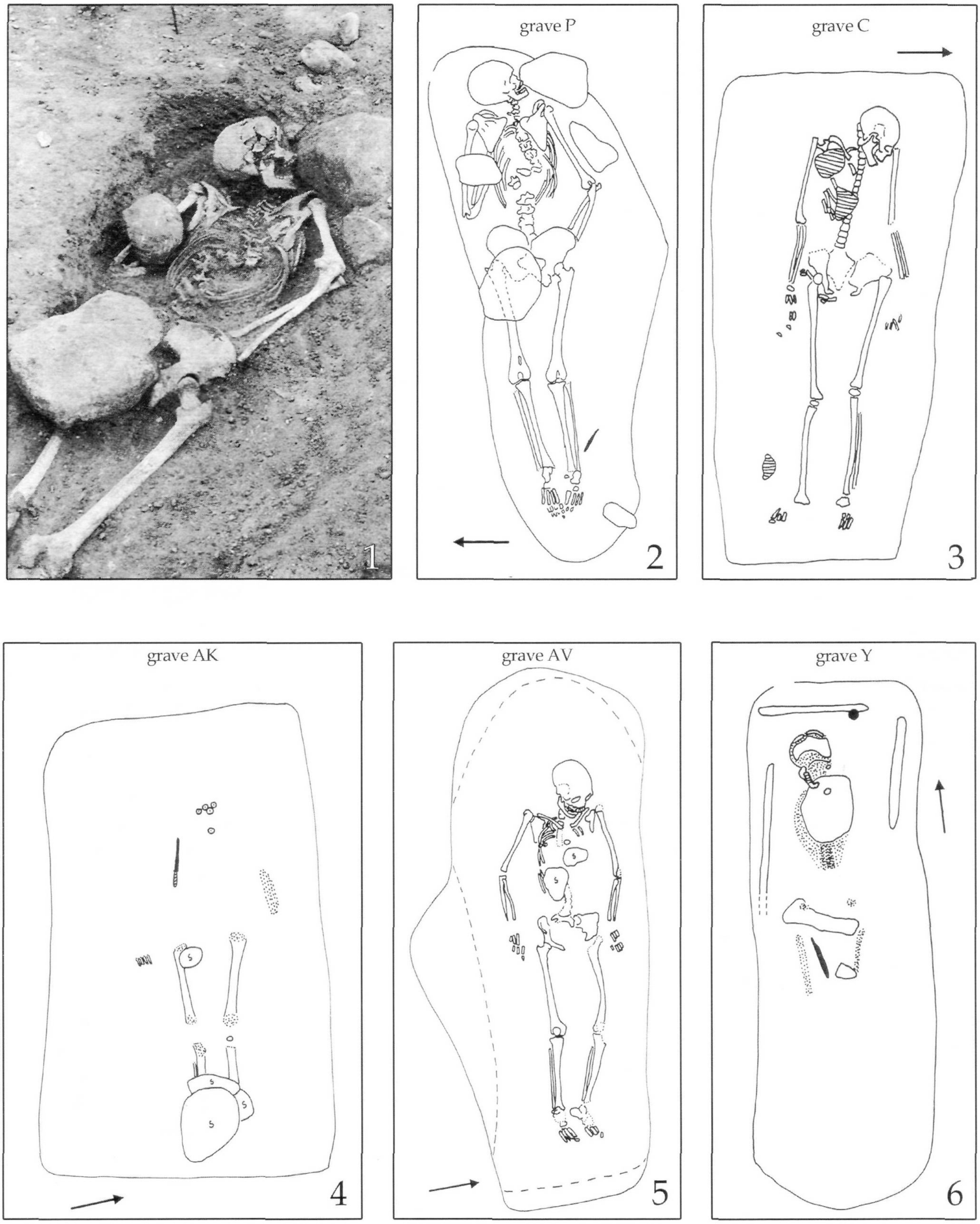
1
grave P
2
grave C
3
grave AK
s
s
s
s
4
grave AV
s
s
5
grave Y
6

Fig. 6.27. Graves with stones from the cemetery at Bogøvej, Langeland, Denmark. Reproduced after Grøn, Krag, Bennike 1994.

however, that the dead buried in some of these graves were accompanied by objects. The woman from grave AV, for example, had a necklace with two glass beads, and her grave also contained some pieces of flint, pottery shards and a snail shell.[114] Grave AK, probably belonging to a female, included five glass beads, an iron knife, pottery shards, and pieces of charcoal and flint.[115] Grave C included only a small iron knife placed by the man's right arm.[116] The fact that some of the deceased were buried with objects *as well as* stones might imply that they were not regarded as revenants who had to be held down to prevent them from haunting the living, but that the stones served some other purpose. In some instances, perhaps it is even possible that they ended up lying on the dead as a result of natural post-depositional processes.[117]

Stoned burials in Viking Age Sweden and Gotland

In Viking Age Sweden, the practice of placing stones on the bodies of the dead does not seem to have been very common: to my knowledge, such rituals have only been discovered in the cemetery at Virentofta.[118] In the post-Viking period, there is also an interesting example of placing large stones over a corpse buried in a late medieval cemetery at Sigtuna.[119]

A number of graves with stones lying directly on the cadavers have been discovered in the Viking Age cemetery at Fröjel in Gotland.[120] Most of the deceased were buried supine with their bodies aligned N-E, but several graves deviated considerably from this model. Atypical examples included prone burials (graves 12/88 and 25/89), a superimposed burial (grave 4/87) and several cases of laying stones over the cadavers (graves 32/88, 9/89 and 19/89). The instances in which stones were placed directly on the bodies of the dead are interpreted by Dan Carlsson[121] as the result of a ritual intended to hold the dead in their graves. However, in more recent studies, both myself[122] and Matthias Toplak have questioned this one-sided view.[123] Two of the stoned burials belonged to women and, interestingly, both contained grave goods. The woman buried in grave 32/88 with two large stones on her pelvis had a gilded bronze finger ring placed by her knee (**Fig. 6.28**).[124] The woman from grave 9/89 had a large stone on her feet, but was buried with a very lavish set of jewellery, including, among other things, two animal head brooches, a bronze pin with an ornamented head, a box brooch, a bronze brooch with chains, a comb, and an iron knife (**Fig. 6.29**). Probably the most remarkable grave from Fröjel is 19/89, which included two individuals - a youngster and an elderly man - buried one over the other at right angles (**Fig. 6.30** and **6.31**).[125] The 'lower' individual died between 16–18 years of age and was laid on his side with the legs flexed. Near his neck was an iron object (perhaps a spearhead, although the condition of the object does not allow for clear identification)[126] enclosed in the man's finger phalanges. At some point during the funerary procedures, a stone was placed on his chest and afterwards the body of an elderly man was laid over it. The older man may have had a necklace around his neck, since there were glass and limestone beads under his chin. In addition, the grave included a single spindle whorl, but it is not clear if it was deposited intentionally, or just swept there with the soil during the backfilling. The exact cause of death of the two individuals has not been determined.

Interpreting these atypical graves from Fröjel is not easy; there are many different possibilities. It is indeed likely that the stones served the purpose of holding the dead in their graves, and reflected a fear of revenants. However, it is also possible that they represent judicial practices and that the site served as a place of execution for convicts, as Carlsson has suggested.[127] The vicinity of the harbor and sea shore, could indeed strengthen this argument because - as we have seen above - in Norse mentalities this would have been an ideal place for the burial of criminals. However, the fact that two of the stoned female graves contained grave goods seems to contradict this - if these were disliked individuals or convicts, why would they be buried with precious objects? An alternative interpretation is that the stones

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[114] Grøn, Krag, Bennike 1994, pp. 29.

[115] Grøn, Krag, Bennike 1994, pp. 20–21.

[116] Grøn, Krag, Bennike 1994, pp. 11.

[117] Gardeła 2012c, p. 160.

[118] Thäte 2007, p. 269.

[119] Wikström, Björk 2008, pp. 62–63.

[120] Carlsson 1999; 2008; Gardeła 2013c, pp. 119, 136; Toplak 2016, pp. 221–226.

[121] Carlsson 1999, p. 109.

[122] Gardeła 2012c, pp. 170–171.

[123] Toplak 2016, p. 223.

[124] Carlsson 1999, pp. 135–137.

[125] Gardeła 2013c, p. 119.

[126] Toplak 2016, p. 222.

[127] Carlsson 1999, p. 158.

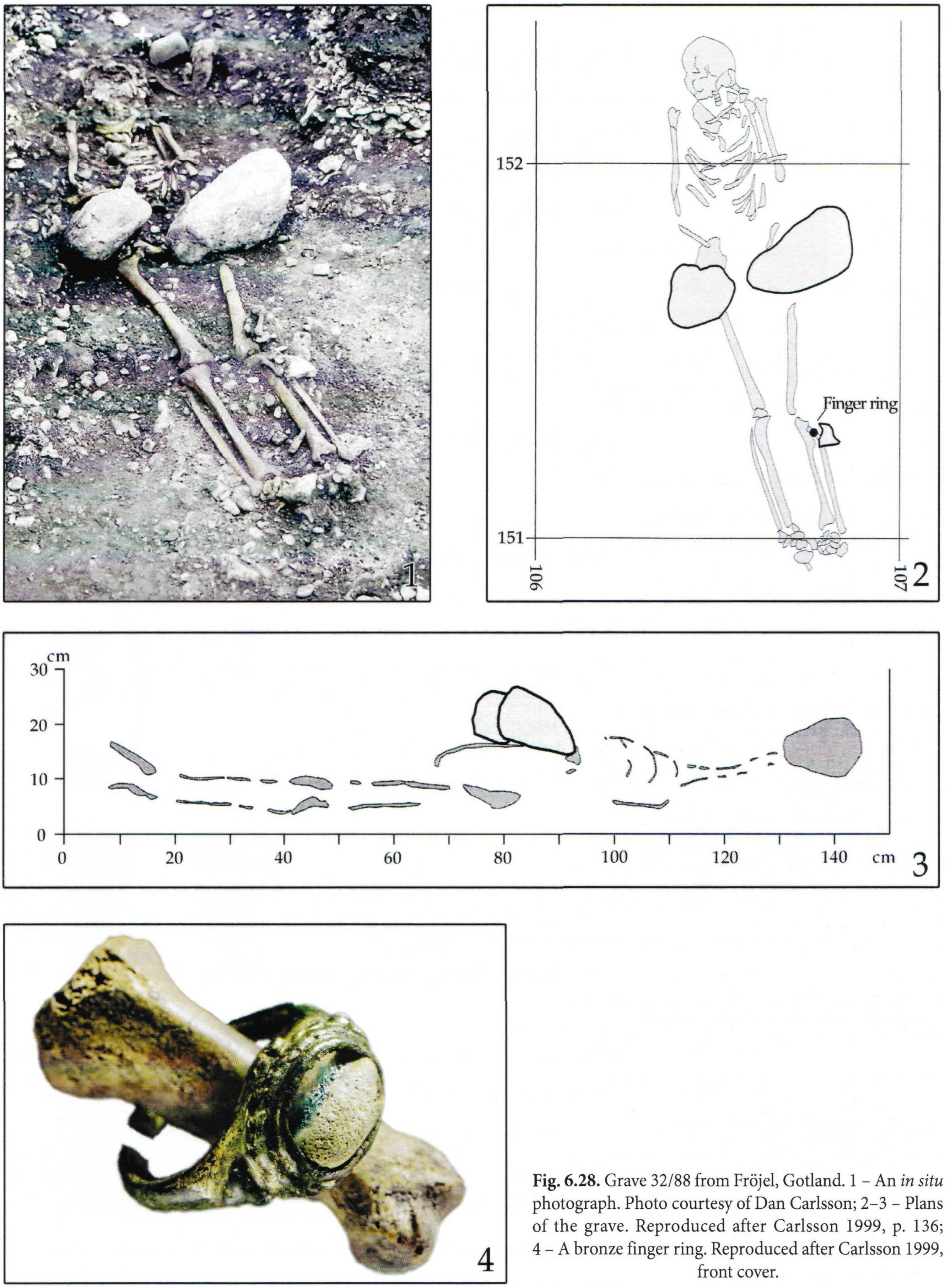

1
152
151
106
107
Finger ring
2
cm
30
20
10
0
0
20
40
60
80
100
120
140
cm
3
4

Fig. 6.28. Grave 32/88 from Fröjel, Gotland. 1 – An *in situ* photograph. Photo courtesy of Dan Carlsson; 2–3 – Plans of the grave. Reproduced after Carlsson 1999, p. 136; 4 – A bronze finger ring. Reproduced after Carlsson 1999, front cover.

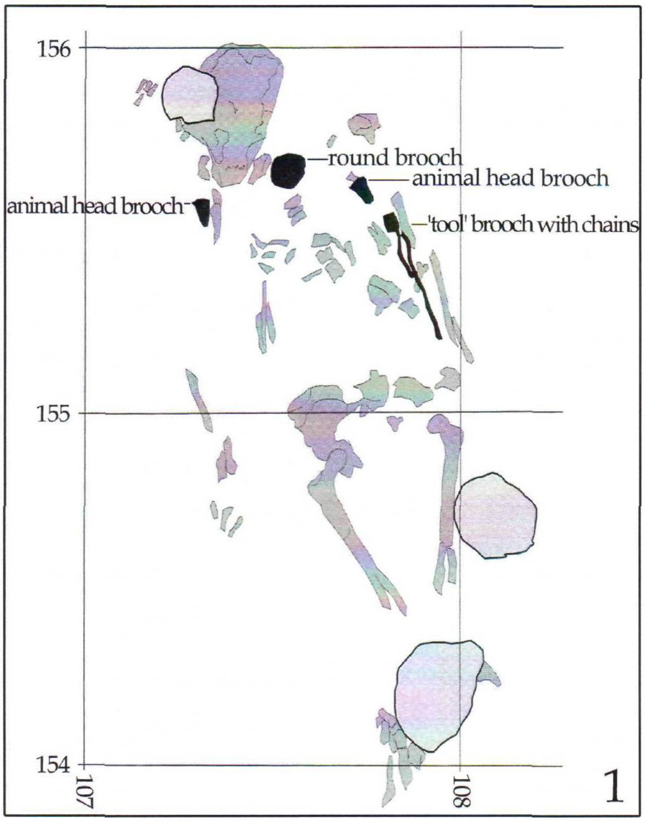
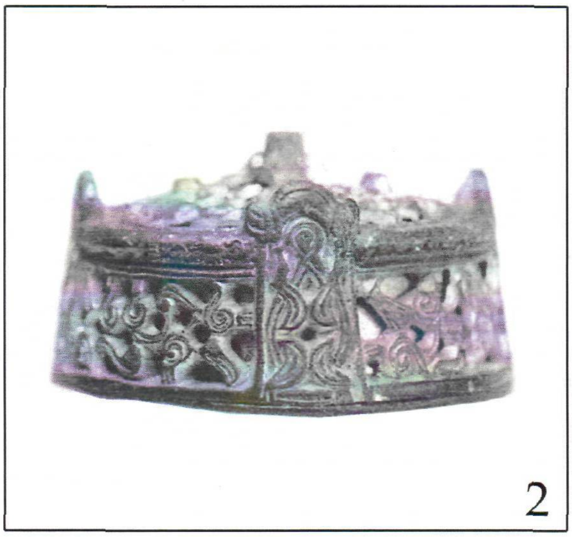
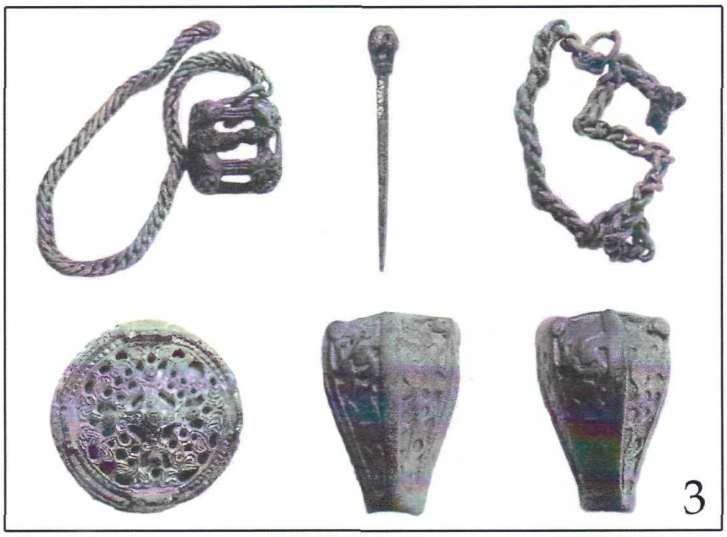
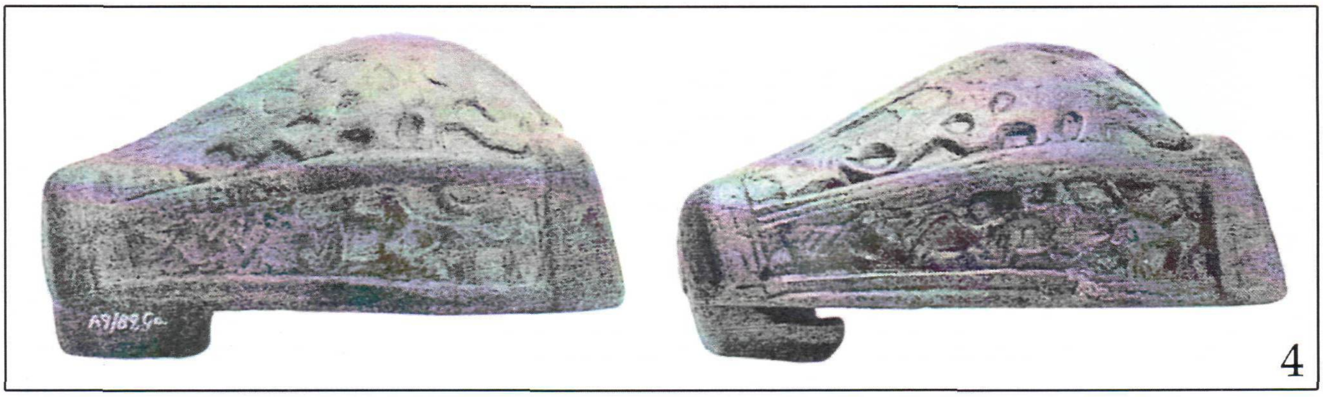

156
round brooch
animal head brooch
animal head brooch
'tool' brooch with chains
155
154
107
108
1

Fig. 6.29. Grave 9/89 from Fröjel, Gotland. 1 – Plan of the grave. Reproduced after Carlsson 1999, p. 138. 2 – Gotlandic box-brooch. After Carlsson 1999, p. 137. 3 – Selection of finds, including two bronze chains, a bronze pin with ornamented head, a box brooch and two animal head brooches. After Carlsson 1999, p. 139. 4 – Details of the two animal head brooches. After Carlsson 1999, p. 139.







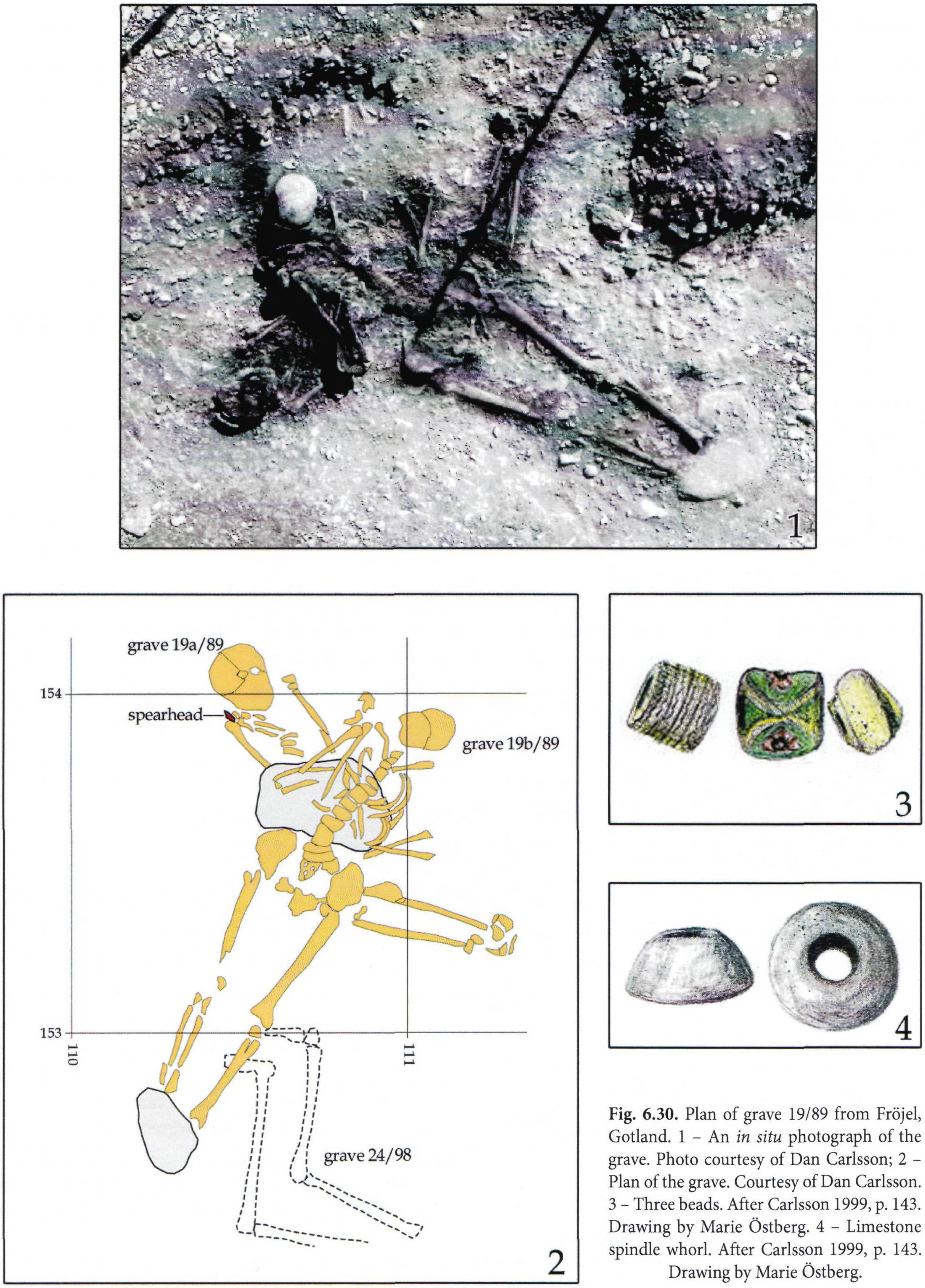

1
grave 19a/89
154
spearhead
grave 19b/89
153
110
111
grave 24/98
2
3
4

Fig. 6.30. Plan of grave 19/89 from Fröjel, Gotland. 1 – An *in situ* photograph of the grave. Photo courtesy of Dan Carlsson; 2 – Plan of the grave. Courtesy of Dan Carlsson. 3 - Three beads. After Carlsson 1999, p. 143. Drawing by Marie Östberg. 4 – Limestone spindle whorl. After Carlsson 1999, p. 143. Drawing by Marie Östberg.

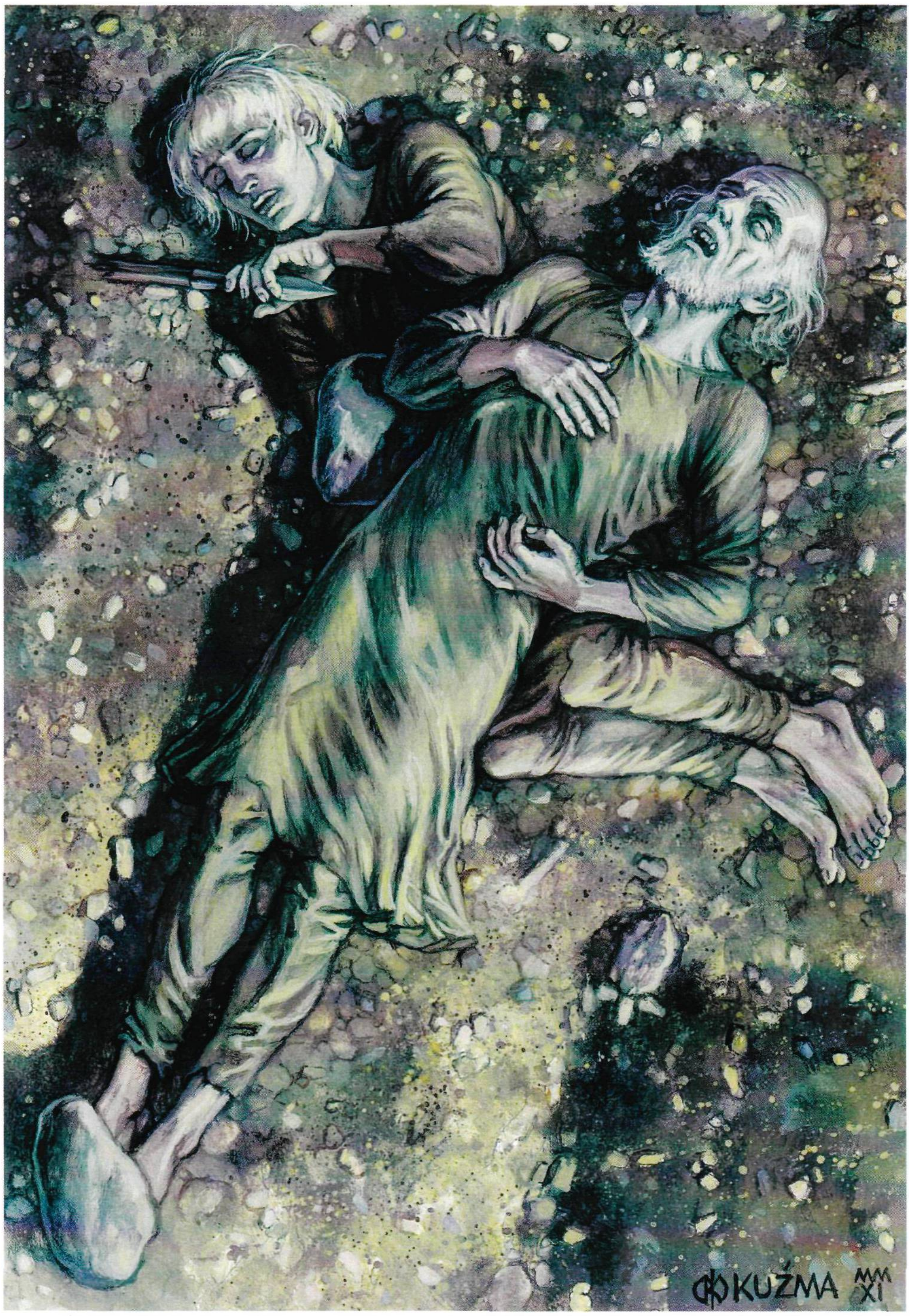


Fig. 6.31. Reconstruction of grave 19/89 from Fröjel, Gotland. Illustration by Mirosław Kuźma. Copyright by Leszek Gardeła and Mirosław Kuźma.

on the bodies played the role of protecting the dead from robbers or animals, or even that they served as grave markers. Overall, the presence of stones in the graves at Fröjel is not very surprising, since the site as a whole is abundant in stones. It may be, that the practice of placing stones in the graves did not have any special meaning at all, but merely helped to quickly and effectively fill out the grave pits. As in the cases discussed above, there are many possible interpretations.

As well as the peculiar stoned burials from Fröjel, several other graves with stones have been found in different cemeteries in Gotland. A recent survey of this phenomenon shows that the stones were mostly laid on the bodies of adults, but in some cases also on children.[128] Interestingly, as in the case of Fröjel, many of the dead buried this way were accompanied by jewellery and other objects.

When discussing the Gotland phenomenon of placing stones on cadavers, it is vital to remember that this is an area where stones are abundant, and their use in funerary contexts should not surprise us. In order to avoid misinterpretations, it is essential to approach each of the stoned burials very carefully and individually. It would be far-fetched to classify all of them as resulting from apotropaic ritual, or any other single intention.

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[128] For a more detailed discussion, see Gardeła 2012c, pp. 171–173.

Stoned burials in Viking Age Iceland

While examining stoned burials in Iceland we encounter the same methodological problem as in the case of Gotland – because the geology of this island is abundant in stones and rocks, their use in graves may have had a purely practical rather than apotropaic purpose. Nevertheless, a careful analysis of Icelandic funerary materials does allow us to isolate several graves in which the stones seem to have been used with a special purpose in mind. One of them is grave Kt-25:1, which was discovered at Haugavað, close to the Traðarholt farm in Árnessýsla, south-western Iceland. Inside this exceptionally large mound – the largest in Iceland in fact – lay an individual covered by a large stone. To the left, remains of what has been interpreted as a sword were found. The major problem with this grave which significantly hampers its detailed interpretation, is that it was excavated in the nineteenth century and no photos or plans have been published.

Another example, which has been relatively well documented is grave Kt-148 from Ormsstaðir (Eiðahreppur, Suður-Múlasýsla), where a fifty-year-old male was buried with an axe, an iron knife and three lead weights and had two stones on the body – one on the left arm and one on the pelvis.[129] In interpreting this example, we encounter a similar problem to that of the furnished graves from Gotland – if the stones were intended to hold down a potential revenant, why would he be buried with a weapon? More likely, in my opinion, is that the stones in this grave had a different purpose, perhaps to protect or position the body in a desired way. Alternatively, we might speculate that the stones served as symbolic substitutes for other objects, perhaps even food.

Particularly interesting is grave Kt-145:2 from Vað in Suður-Múlasýsla where a man had been buried on his left side and his body covered with two colourful rhyolite slabs (**Fig. 6.32** and **Fig. 6.33**).[130] Near his face was a very large whetstone, and at his feet a dog that had been killed with a blow to the head. The discovery of an iron nail in the grave suggests that it was lined with wood, or alternatively that the deceased was laid on wooden boards. In a previous study, I have pointed out that the crouched position of the man may have resulted from *rigor mortis*. If this was indeed the case, then the covering of his body with stones could have been intended to prevent the man's return as a revenant.[131] Several saga accounts – such as *Eyrbyggja saga* and *Egils saga Skalla-Grímssonar* – mention very peculiar mortuary rituals for individuals who died a bad death. In *Eyrbyggja saga* (ch. 30), a man named Þórólfr dies in his chair with his eyes wide open, and when his body is found on the morning of the next day, the head is wrapped with clothes (due to fear of the evil eye), and the corpse removed from the house through a hole made in one of the walls.[132] Þórólfr is then buried in an isolated place because people are afraid of his return as a revenant. Despite all of these apotropaic precautions, he does in fact rise from his grave to sow terror among the living, and only after several reburials and the complete cremation of his body, is peace restored. Although impossible to prove, it may be the case that the man buried at Vað also died a bad death: the stones would have served the apotropaic role of preventing him from walking. However, the presence of grave goods (whetstone and dog) might contradict this view, and it may be the case that the rhyolites served the purpose of protecting his body and the contents of his grave from the intrusion of animals or potential robbers.

Stoned burials in Viking Age Norway

Speaking of the practice of stoning and placing stones in graves it is necessary to mention the case of the remarkable Oseberg ship, one of the most famous archaeological discoveries from Viking Age Norway.[133] The ship was furnished with lavish objects made of various materials, the most spectacular of which were four elaborately

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[129] Friðriksson 2000, p. 587; Eldjárn 2000, pp. 236–238; Gardeła 2012c, p. 178.

[130] Þóra Pétursdóttir 2007, p. 54; Gardeła 2012b, pp. 392–393; 2012c, pp. 175–177.

[131] Gardeła 2012c, pp. 176–177.

[132] For a more detailed discussion of this episode, see Gardeła 2013c, pp. 100–105.

[133] Brøgger, Falk, Schetelig 1917a; 1917b; Brøgger, Schetelig 1927; 1928.

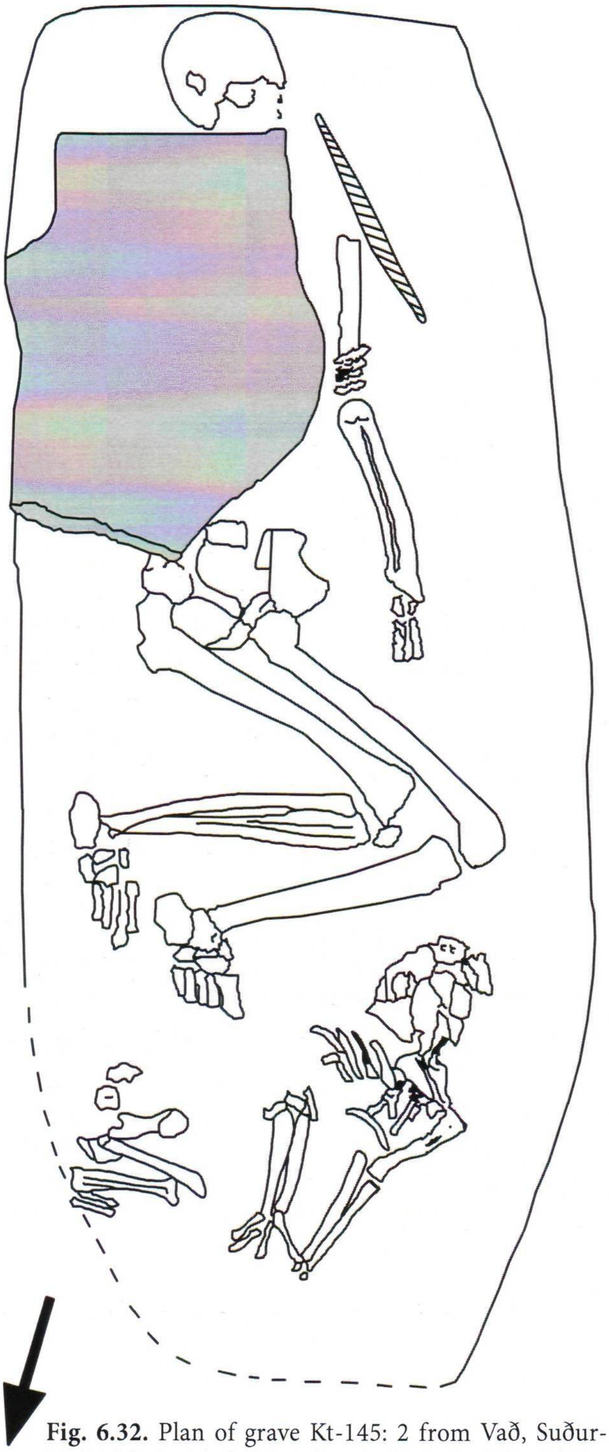

Fig. 6.32. Plan of grave Kt-145: 2 from Vað, Suður-Múlasýsla, Iceland. Reproduced after Þóra Pétursdóttir 2007, p. 54.

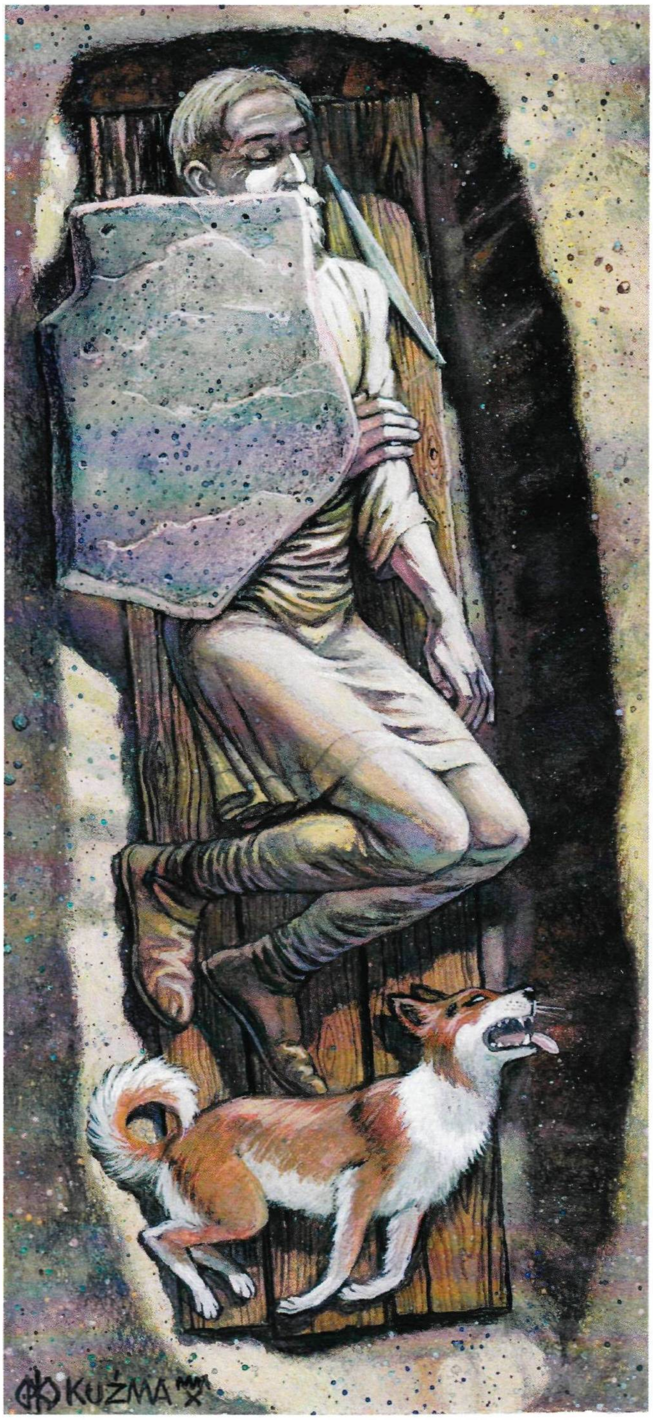

Fig. 6.33. Reconstruction of grave Kt-145, from Vað, Suður-Múlasýsla, Iceland. Illustration by Mirosław Kuźma. Copyright by Leszek Gardeła and Mirosław Kuźma.

decorated sleighs and a wagon. Amidships, a wooden chamber had been erected, in which two women were buried. There are good reasons to think that this grave, like those from Gerdrup and Trekroner-Grydehøj, belonged to an individual who dealt with magic – this is suggested not only by its overall composition, but also by a number of finds displaying special characteristics, such as an elaborate textile showing a (religious?) procession, cannabis seeds, and other items that may have been ritual paraphernalia.[134] Although much can be said about this fascinating grave, for the present discussion

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[134] See discussions in Price 2002, pp. 159–160; Gardeła 2016d, pp. 66–73.

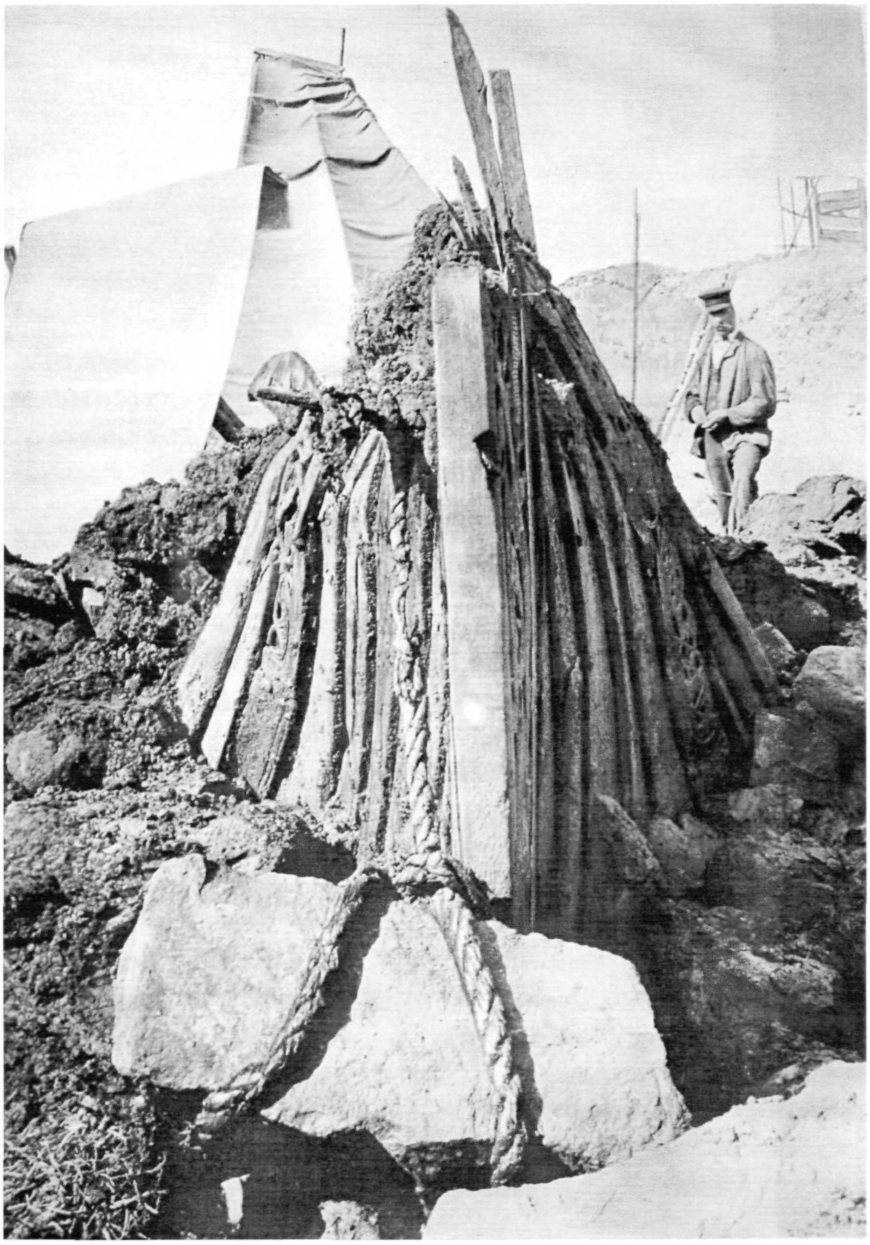

Fig. 6.34. The Oseberg ship anchored to a large rock. After Brøgger 1917, p. 51.

the most significant aspect of Oseberg is that at some point during the funerary procedures the prow of the ship was anchored to a large rock (**Fig. 6.34**). Moreover, various goods deposited on the ship's foredeck were smashed with stones in the course of further ritual acts. The meaning of the stone anchor has been interpreted in many different ways by archaeologists – some have argued that it represents an attempt to prevent the dead from sailing away to the Otherworld, while others have suggested that this reflects a fear of revenants.[135] The case of Oseberg is another example of how multifaceted the significance of stones in graves from Viking Age Scandinavia may have been.

Stoning and stoned burials in Anglo-Saxon England

Archaeological evidence implies that stoning was a relatively rare practice in Early Anglo-Saxon cemeteries in England. According to Andrew Reynolds, 'within sixty-five examples identified, stoning is second in popularity to prone burial as a burial rite'.[136] The practice of placing or throwing stones on corpses in the period spanning the fifth to the eighth centuries is attested from the following sites: Abingdon,

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[135] For various interpretations of the stone anchor at Oseberg, see Christensen 1992, p. 81; Ingstad 1992, p. 256; Nordström 2006, p. 331; Dommasnes 2006, p. 127; Gardeła 2012c, pp. 182–183.

[136] Reynolds 2009, p. 81.

Alfriston, Alvediston, Appledown, Bidford-on-Avon, Collingbourne Ducis, Dover Buckland, Frilford, Lechlade, Loveden Hill, Orpington, Sewerby, Spong Colville, Windall II and Woodingdean.[137] The majority of graves were oriented W-E (48%) while the rest were oriented NW-SE (21%) and SW-NE (13%), with only a few examples of N-S (6%), SW-NW (2%) and NE-SW (2%) orientations. Most are concentrated in the Upper Thames valley.[138]

Reynolds' study clearly demonstrates that in Early Anglo-Saxon England stones could be placed over different parts of the body – the arms, legs, feet, pelvic region or even the head. From Bidford-on-Avon, there is an example of a single female skull surrounded with stones[139] – as we have seen in Chapter 5, this case has some interesting parallels in early medieval Poland.

As in other areas of the early medieval world, the stoning practice in England appears to have been rather diverse. In some cases, even beehive querns were placed or thrown onto the buried individuals,[140] and in grave O from Woodingdean the body of a woman who had been buried in a prone position was covered with flints.[141] It may be worth noting here that, in his work on vampirism, Barber also describes early Anglo-Saxon graves in which heavy flint covered the heads and bodies of children, but without giving any interpretation of what this may have meant.[142] I have been unable to identify parallel examples in the early medieval material from the Viking and Slavic worlds.

It is possible that some of the well-furnished Anglo-Saxon female burials which were filled with tightly packed stones could have belonged to so-called 'cunning women', who engaged in the practice of magic.[143] In addition to containing stones, these graves often included rather extraordinary assortments of goods, including an ivory bag, a ring, and objects from chatelaine (grave 29 from Abingdon), as well as a beaver tooth and a Roman altar fragment (grave 18 at Lechlade).[144] In his interpretation of stoned burials, Reynolds writes:

> One of the most interesting aspects of the stoned burials is their rather restricted presence among a small number of communities. This feature, along with the broad geographical distribution of cemeteries where the rite is found, suggests again a commonly understood practice, but one that was perhaps driven more by the customs of individual communities who evidently applied the rite with a relatively high degree of frequency in comparison to other communities utilizing other deviant burial rites. Such a patterning may even indicate a heightened level of superstition among communities utilizing the rite.[145]

Amongst later Anglo-Saxon execution sites dating from the Christian period (seventh to eleventh centuries), Reynolds isolates only nine individuals which had stones placed or thrown onto them. In his opinion:

> The motivation to cover a corpse with material other than the soil from the excavation of the grave probably had a superstitious basis similar to that suggested to explain prone burial and decapitation in pagan Anglo-Saxon cemeteries.[146]

Stoning, as a form of the death penalty, is recorded in the Anglo-Saxon law code of Æthelstan (924–939) as a punishment for slaves who committed theft, but it was also performed on slaves who had run away from their masters:

> In the case of a male slave, sixty and twenty slaves shall go and stone him. And if any of them fails three times to hit him, he shall himself be scourged three times.[147]
>
> With reference to our slaves, those of us who possess slaves have declared: if anyone steals a slave, half a pound shall be paid for him. If we succeed in getting payment, he [the owner] shall receive an additional sum according to the appearance of the slave, and we shall keep the surplus of what we are awarded in the suit. If, however, a slave runs away, he shall be taken out and stoned as has already been decreed. And each man who has a slave shall pay either a penny or a halfpenny according to the numbers of the association, so as to make up the proper amount.[148]

The use of stones with apotropaic intent is recorded in William of Malmesbury's *Gesta Regum*, which concerns the burial of a 'witch of Berkeley' who died in 1046. Her body was wrapped in the skin of a stag and interred in a stone coffin fastened with iron and lead.[149] An additional large stone was placed on top of the coffin. Reynolds concludes that '[t]he story itself may well contain a grain of truth with regard to how a witch might be treated when buried'.[150] As we have seen above, there is a significant body of comparative evidence from the Viking world to support this claim.

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[137] Reynolds 2009, p. 83.

[138] Reynolds 2009, pp. 84–85.

[139] Reynolds 2009, p. 84.

[140] Reynolds 2009, p. 83.

[141] Reynolds 2009, p. 84.

[142] Barber 2010, p. 79.

[143] Reynolds 2009, p. 83.

[144] Reynolds 2009, p. 83.

[145] Reynolds 2009, p. 92.

[146] Reynolds 2009, pp. 172–173.

[147] Reynolds 2009, p. 253.

[148] Reynolds 2009, p. 255.

[149] Reynolds 2009, p. 93.

Particularly relevant to the debate about the significance of stones in Anglo-Saxon funerals is the cemetery at Raunds Furnells in Northamptonshire. At this site, stones occur in numerous graves, and often surrounding or covering the heads of the deceased (**Fig. 6.35**).[151] In this case, the motivation of the mourners may have been to protect the dead during the backfilling of the grave, or against intrusions from wild animals. It appears, however, that on occasion the placement of stones over a particular part of the body could be related to injuries or illnesses which the deceased individuals had suffered.[152] One example is the placement of stones around the crippled knee and head of a man buried in grave 5074 at Raunds Furnells. The particulars of this site, when compared with, for example, the cemeteries at Stary Zamek or Niemcza in Silesia (see above), suggest that the act of placing stones over the body may have had nothing or very little to do with magic or apotropaic rituals, but was instead used with the sole intention of protecting the dead. The case of Raunds Furnells is evidence that stoning practices in England had ambivalent meanings. As Reynolds observes:

> (…) stoning in Anglo-Saxon cemeteries was applied with a dual purpose of marking a damaged or diseased body part and also as a means of weighting down a visibly different and potentially 'suspicious' person.[153]

When debating the meaning of stones in funerary contexts in Anglo-Saxon England, it is essential to be aware of the fact that, as in the case of Iceland and Gotland, the occurrence of stones in graves in some areas may simply be a result of local geology: the abundance of stones at these sites would make it practically impossible to avoid their occurrence in the grave. However, in areas where there is a predominance of sand, gravel or clay, the presence of stones in graves does indeed reflect intentional mortuary practices with a wide range of motivations.[154]

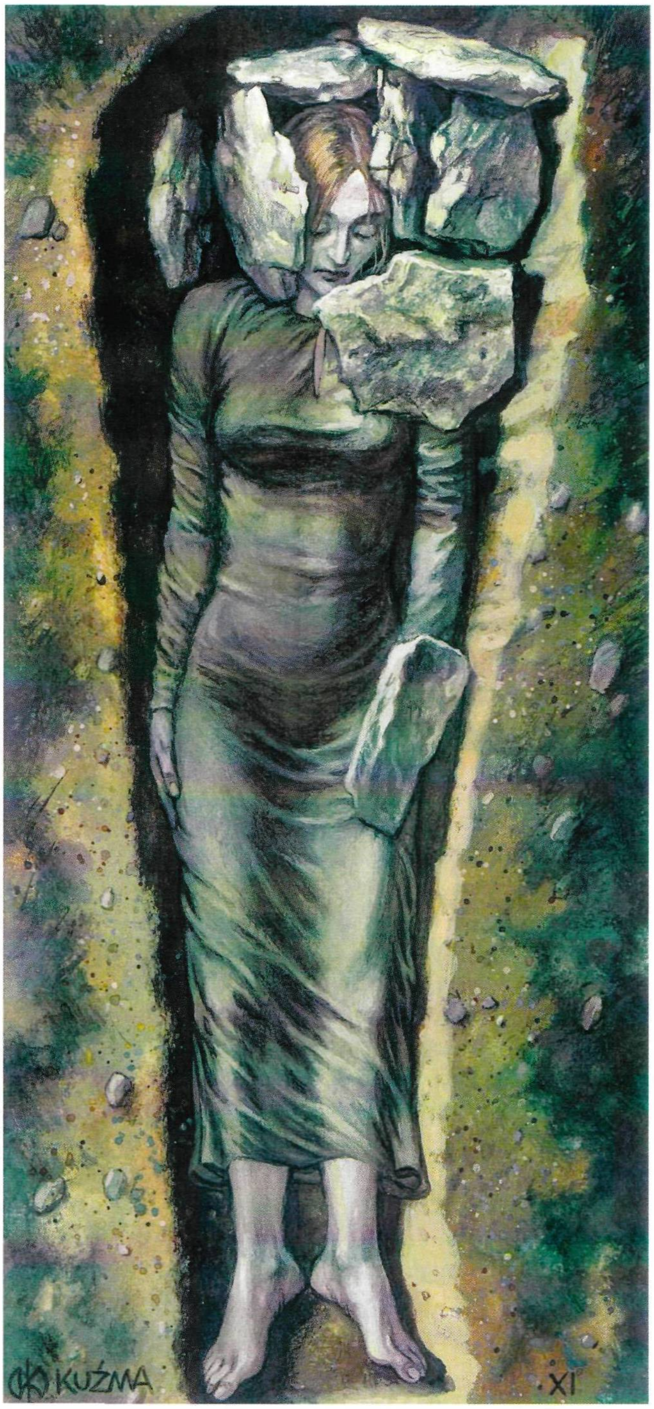

Fig. 6.35. Reconstruction of grave 5056 from Raunds Furnells, Northamptonshire, England. Illustration by Mirosław Kuźma. Copyright by Leszek Gardeła and Mirosław Kuźma.

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[150] Reynolds 2009, p. 93.

[151] Boddington 1996, pp. 38–47.

[152] See also Williams 2006, pp. 109–111.

[153] Reynolds 2009, p. 93.

[154] Reynolds 2009, p. 82.

6. CONCLUSIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH ON STONED BURIALS IN EARLY MEDIEVAL POLAND

In previous studies, stoned burials from early medieval Poland have usually been interpreted as signs of anti-vampire practices in which the stones were intended to prevent the dangerous dead from rising. In light of the various sources surveyed above, however, the practice of placing or throwing stones (or other heavy objects) on the bodies of the deceased appears to have had more than just one purpose. A comprehensive and cross-cultural analysis of this phenomenon has allowed to arrive at newer, more careful and more nuanced interpretations.

The conclusions that arise from this chapter's survey of Polish early medieval stoned burials are as follows:

- The stoning of bodies was associated with male and female individuals.
- Stones were usually placed on the chest, legs and feet of the deceased. Only in Cedynia were stones used as substitutes for missing heads.
- In contrast to the examples from Scandinavia (cf. grave P from Bogøvej) and England, the practice of stoning does not coincide with prone burial. The only exception to this rule is grave 47 from Radom.
- Based on the evidence at hand, the stoning of the body seems to have been intended as an apotropaic rite *only in a few cases*. The most likely graves which could be interpreted in this light are 104 from Niemcza, 24 from Stary Zamek and 47 from Radom.
- The intention behind placing stones or tiles on the neck or under the head[155] of the deceased may have been rather prosaic: it may simply have served the role of preventing the jawbone from dropping so the mourners could display the deceased person in an aesthetic way during the funeral. However, it is also possible that the reason for wanting to prevent the jawbone from dropping could be related to a belief shared amongst the Slavs that corpses with an open mouth were likely to become revenants[156] or that the living dead tend to 'bite' and consume their clothes or bodies.[157] Alternatively, the practice of placing stones or even bricks[158] around the head could relate to a Christian funerary custom according to which the body of the deceased should be aligned W-E and facing east, towards the rising sun which symbolises the coming of Christ. The stones around the head would support it and ensure that the dead were facing the right way whilst awaiting their resurrection.[159]
- We should also remember that stones could have a purely practical function, and need not be related to aesthetic, magic or religious practices at all. In the Slavic world as well as in some of the Scandinavian and Anglo-Saxon examples already discussed, stones placed on or above the body (or even on the wooden coffin) could have served the important purpose of protecting it from rodents, carnivores and/or potential robbers.

In addition to the graves discussed above, it is worth mentioning traces of a very complex funerary ritual involving the use of stones and fire which was noted in grave 10, in the early medieval cemetery in Dębczyno, Western Pomerania. Originally, the remains of a woman seem to have been buried in a pit, around 1m deep and aligned NE-SW.[160] After some time had passed, the grave was reopened and the bones of the deceased were partly removed. The pit was then filled with a liquid containing calcium. Following this, a large granite stone was placed crosswise in the pit, which was filled up to half its depth with sand. Next, a fire was started and the retrieved bones were cremated. After the cremation, the bones were covered with a pink sandstone. No archaeological parallels to this peculiar and multi-part ritual have been discovered from the Slavic area, but given the effort required, it is has been suggested that the purpose of the ritual was to ensure the annihilation of the dead woman.[161] As some scholars have argued, the co-occurrence of multiple unusual practices for a single grave is a good indication that the people responsible for the burial considered the deceased to be potentially dangerous.[162] Multi-stage rituals conducted to annihilate and/or 'immobilize' the dead are found in folkloristic sources from the Slavic area and elsewhere in Europe. For example, Barber describes a ritual where a body was:

> (...) taken to the border and decapitated. A stone was then inserted into the mouth, and the body was cut open, washed out with boiling wine, staked through the heart, and left for animals to eat.[163]

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[155] Miśkiewicz 2010, p. 136. Two early medieval graves with stones under the head are known from the cemetery at Psary (graves 35 and 53) – see Kufel-Dzierzgowska 1975, p. 376.

[156] Barber 2010, p. 36.

[157] Wyrwa 2008, p. 56.

[158] The custom of placing bricks around the heads of the deceased is attested, for example, from the graves of Benedictines buried in Moglino in Poland – see Chudziakowa, Czacharowski 1977; Pytlak 2009, pp. 25–26.

[159] Pytlak 2009, p. 25.

[160] Sikorski 2000.

[161] Sikorski 2000.

[162] See, for example, Zoll-Adamikowa 1971, p. 52; Żydok 2004, p. 45.

[163] Barber 2010, p. 75.

He concludes:

> When a revenant is unusually tenacious, so that a series of attempts are made on its 'life', the last method used is usually cremation, which seems always to be effective.[164]

Interestingly, the bodies of some malevolent revenants in Old Norse sagas were also subjected to cremation, after which they never returned to haunt the living (e.g. this is what happened to the infamous Þorólfr bægifótr from *Eyrbyggja saga*, after he had been exhumed).

Overall, as in the case of other atypical funerary phenomena in Poland, the most reasonable way to unravel the intricate meanings of stoned burials is to always approach each case individually, and avoid immediately labelling all stoned burials as belonging to revenants or vampires. In future research, field archaeologists should pay more attention to recording the exact positions of stones in grave fills, and should include drawings or photographs which would allow other scholars to clearly determine whether or not the stones actually lay over the bodies. Closer collaboration with geologists could also help to provide further details, not only about the types of stones used in funerary contexts, but also about their origin. While it is likely that many of the stones from burials were local to the area, others may have been brought from more distant locations – a closer study of these exceptional cases could provide important details about the logistics of past funerals and about the symbolic significance of stones in mortuary contexts. Physical anthropologists should also engage more actively in the study of stoned burials and attempt to determine whether stoning occurred *post-mortem* or was the actual cause of death. At the present stage none of the stoned burials have undergone such detailed and multidisciplinary analysis. It is hoped, however, that this will change in the coming years.

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[164] Barber 2010, p. 75.

Table 3. Graves from early medieval Poland with stones on the deceased and graves where stones substitute for heads

No.	Site	Grave number	Sex	Age	Orientation	Placement of stones	Grave goods	Dating	References
1.	Bodzia, Kuyavian-Pomeranian Voivodeship	E870	F	20–25	N-S	A quern stone was placed over the head	None	11th century	Sobkowiak-Tabaka 2015, pp. 130–131; Zamelska-Monczak 2015, pp. 310–311
2.	Cedynia (site 2), West Pomeranian Voivodeship	60	?	?	NE-SW	Three stones were found in this grave. One of the stones was in place of a missing skull. Two other stones were lying to the right of the stone that substituted for the skull	A ring made of thick bronze tape. The outer side of the ring bears an inscription: HANUT + HUNUT	12th–13th century	Malinowska-Łazarczyk 1982(II), p. 19; Porzeziński 2008, pp. 23, 27; Gardeła 2011b, p. 176
3.	Cedynia (site 2), West Pomeranian Voivodeship	63	?	19–36	NE-SW	Three stones were found in this grave. Two stones were lying on the right arm and one on the right hand of the deceased	None	12th–13th century	Malinowska-Łazarczyk 1982(II), pp. 19–20; Porzeziński 2008, pp. 18, 23; Gardeła 2011b, p. 176
4.	Cedynia (site 2a), West Pomeranian Voivodeship	68	F	36–56	SW-NE	More than seven stones were found in this grave. The stones were lying on the feet, shins and knees of the deceased. One small stone was lying on the chest	None	12th–13th century	Malinowska-Łazarczyk 1982(II), p. 21; Porzeziński 2006, p. 151; tabl. XIII; 2008, pp. 23–24; Gardeła 2011b, p. 176
5.	Cedynia (site 2), West Pomeranian Voivodeship	146	M	19–36	ES-WN	Three stones were found in place of a missing skull NOTE: The skull was lying between the man's feet. It is likely that the skull was buried without a jawbone, but this is inferred only on the basis of the drawing. The description of the grave does not mention this feature at all	None	12th–13th century	Malinowska-Łazarczyk 1982(II), p. 38; Porzeziński 2008, pp. 16, 23, 29; Wrzesiński 2008b, p. 152; Gardeła 2011b, pp. 176, 178
6.	Cedynia (site 2), West Pomeranian Voivodeship	186	M	?	N-S	Three stones covered the whole skeleton	None	12th–13th century	Malinowska-Łazarczyk 1982(II), p. 47; Porzeziński 2008, pp. 16, 23, 29; Wrzesiński 2008b, p. 152; Gardeła 2011b, p. 176

No.	Site	Grave number	Sex	Age	Orientation	Placement of stones	Grave goods	Dating	References
7.	Cedynia (site 2), West Pomeranian Voivodeship	196	?	?	E-W	Four stones were found in this grave. One of the stones substituted for a missing skull. Three other stones were located to the left of the left leg	None	12^{th}–13^{th} century	Malinowska-Łazarczyk 1982(II), p. 49; Porzeziński 2008, pp. 23, 30; Gardeła 2011b, p. 176
8.	Cedynia (site 2), West Pomeranian Voivodeship	215	F	19–36	NE-SW(?)	Only one stone was found in this grave. It was substituting for a missing skull	Below the stone there was a single temple ring made of bronze	12^{th}–13^{th} century	Malinowska-Łazarczyk 1982(II), p. 54; Porzeziński 2008, pp. 17, 23, 30; Gardeła 2011b, p. 176
9.	Cedynia (site 2), West Pomeranian Voivodeship	530	M	?	S-N	Only one stone was found in this grave. It was substituting for a missing skull	None	12^{th}–13^{th} century	Malinowska-Łazarczyk 1982(II), p. 123; Porzeziński 2008, pp. 23, 31; Gardeła 2011b, p. 177
10.	Cedynia (site 2), West Pomeranian Voivodeship	552	?	?	W-E	Only one stone was found in this grave. It was substituting for a missing skull	A leather band with 15 fittings made of bronze foil, a round belt buckle made of bronze	12^{th}–13^{th} century	Malinowska-Łazarczyk 1982(II), p. 130; Porzeziński 2008, pp. 23, 32; Gardeła 2011b, p. 177
11.	Cedynia (site 2), West Pomeranian Voivodeship	639	M	*Maturus*	W-E	Three flat stones were found on the skeleton – one on the head, one on the chest and one on the left leg NOTE: The deceased appears to have been buried in a coffin. The stones could have been placed on the lid and subsided as a result of post-depositional processes or, alternatively, could have lain directly on the body. Traces of round posts have been identified around the grave, perhaps serving as external markers	None	12^{th}–13^{th} century	Malinowska-Łazarczyk 1982(II), p. 153; Stanaszek 2016a, p. 95
12.	Cedynia (site 2), West Pomeranian Voivodeship	888	M	Over 60	NE-SW	Only one stone was found in this grave. It was substituting for a missing skull	None	12^{th}–13^{th} century	Porzeziński 2008, pp. 23, 35; Gardeła 2011b, p. 177

No.	Site	Grave number	Sex	Age	Orientation	Placement of stones	Grave goods	Dating	References
13.	Dziekanowice (site 22), Greater Poland Voivodeship	11/92	?	8–10	E-W	Above the knees of the deceased and the 6cm layer of soil that covered them was a large stone. Two stones were also found under the legs, two under the right arm and four under the back	An iron knife set up vertically in the ground	11th–12th century	Wrzesińscy 1993, pp. 161, 171; Stępnik 2009a, p. 275; Gardeła 2011b, p. 175
14.	Dziekanowice (site 22), Greater Poland Voivodeship	27/92	?	*Adultus*	E-W	A large stone on the pelvis of the deceased. Several smaller stones were lying on the knees	A ball-shaped stone, a fragment of a corroded iron wire	11th–12th century	Wrzesińscy 1993, pp. 163, 171; Stępnik 2009a, p. 275; Gardeła 2011b, p. 175
15.	Kałdus (site 4), Kuyavian-Pomeranian Voivodeship	32/00 (82)	F	*Adultus*	NW-SE	A large, flat stone on the pelvis NOTE: Apparently, both the hands and the feet of the deceased were cut off and lay at the bottom of the pit	None	Early medieval	Bojarski 2003, p. 22
16.	Kałdus (site 4), Kuyavian-Pomeranian Voivodeship	48/00 (110)	F	*Maturus*	NW-SE	A large sandstone rock (55×43×21cm) on the skeleton NOTE: The deceased was buried in a flexed position on the left side. Remains of wood were found in the skull, above the right eye – perhaps from a stake	None	Early medieval	Bojarski 2003, pp. 22–23; Stawska, Bojarski, Chudziak 2010a, p. 65; Bojarski, Chudziak, Drozd, Koperkiewicz, Kozłowski, Stawska 2010, p. 452
17.	Koninko, Greater Poland Voivodeship	15	F	*Adultus*	NW-SE	Numerous stones of various sizes on the lower parts of the skeleton NOTE: The eastern part of the grave was disturbed by a newer pit, which was probably dug soon after the burial	An iron knife in a leather scabbard with bronze fittings and rivets, textile remains	11th–12th century	Stępnik 2009a, pp. 271, 273–274; 2009b, pp. 27, 29; Gardeła 2011b, p. 175
18.	Krusza Zamkowa, Kuyavian-Pomeranian Voivodeship	7	M	36–55	NW-SE	A large, flat and rectangular-shaped stone on the deceased	None	Second half of the 12th century	Mendyk 1989, pp. 175, 185

No.	Site	Grave number	Sex	Age	Orientation	Placement of stones	Grave goods	Dating	References
19.	Legnica-Zamek, Lower Silesian Voivodeship	II	?	35–40	W-E	A number of stones on the skeleton (it is not specified where exactly they were placed nor how many there were)	None	11th–12th century	Informator 1972, p. 190; Żydok 2004, p. 47; Gardeła 2011b, p. 177
20.	Małachowo, Greater Poland Voivodeship	10	M	25–35	?	A large stone on the chest of the deceased	None	Early medieval	Firek 1984, p. 16; Kordala 2006, pp. 122–123; Gardeła 2011b: p. 177; Zamelska-Monczak 2015, p. 311
21.	Niemcza, Lower Silesian Voivodeship	104	F	40–50	?	A large stone slab (weighing over a dozen kg) on the chest and pelvis	None	Mid–10th century	Bal, Fercowicz, Kaźmierczyk 1982; Malinowski 1982; Lorkiewicz, Malinowski 1993; Lorkiewicz, Malinowski, Puch 1995; Stanaszek 2000, pp. 94–95; 2016b, pp. 18–19; Żydok 2004, p. 47; Gardeła 2011b, p. 177
22.	Poznań-Śródka, Greater Poland Voivodeship	1	?	12–13	E-W	Around 35–40 stones were covering the body of the deceased	A fragment of an iron object (probably a pin), an iron nail, a fragment of unidentified silver foil, a fragment of an iron knife, 193 pieces of pottery, charcoal (*Pinus* sp.), 14 fragments of animal bones (2 fragments of fish-bone, 1 fragment of sheep bone, 1 fragment of bird bone and 10 fragments of unidentified bones)	11th century	Pawlak 1998, pp. 222–224; Stępnik 2009a, p. 275; Gardeła 2011b, p. 175
23.	Radom (site 4), Masovian Voivodeship	32	?	?	E-W	Stone on the deceased	?	11th–12th century	Kurasiński, Skóra 2013, p. 149

No.	Site	Grave number	Sex	Age	Orientation	Placement of stones	Grave goods	Dating	References
24.	Radom (site 4), Masovian Voivodeship	47	M	?	E-W	The whole body was covered with sixteen stones of various shapes and sizes, each weighing between 20–30kg	Pottery shards	11th–12th century	Rosiński 1950, pp. 327–340; Gąssowski 1950, pp. 305–326; Kowalczyk 1968, pp. 82–83; Gieysztor 1982, p. 223; 2006, fig. 24; Pawlak 1998, p. 252; Żydok 2004, p. 17; Stępnik 2009a, p. 275; Gardeła 2011b, p. 177; Stanaszek 2016b, pp. 20–21
25.	Sokolniki, Lower Silesian Voivodeship	5	M	?	E-W	Stone on the body	An iron knife	11th–12th century	Śledzik-Kamińska, Terlecka 1988
26.	Sokolniki, Lower Silesian Voivodeship	15	F	?	W-E	Stone on the body	None	11th–12th century	Śledzik-Kamińska, Terlecka 1988
27.	Sokolniki, Lower Silesian Voivodeship	16	M	?	W-E	Stone on the body	None	11th–12th century	Śledzik-Kamińska, Terlecka 1988
28.	Stary Zamek, Lower Silesian Voivodeship	24	M	*Adultus*	E-W	One large stone was lying on the pelvis	An iron knife	10th–11th century	Wachowski 1992, pp. 19, 42, 47
29.	Żukowo, Masovian Voivodeship	9/9a	M+F	?	N-S	One large stone on the thighs and pelvis, two large stones on the chest. A number of stones of varying sizes surrounded the body of the deceased. NOTE: Grave 9 was superimposed over another grave 9a, which also included a male(?) individual. It is unclear whether both individuals were buried at the same time or not	An iron strike-a-light, an iron knife, an unidentified iron fragment (perhaps a fragment of a knife tang), two iron spurs, an unidentified object (now lost), pottery fragments	11th–12th century	Dzik 2006, pp. 29–31, fig. 11–12
30.	Żukowo, Masovian Voivodeship	13	Child	Newborn	S-E	The skeleton was covered with a number of stones. Their average diameter was 30cm	None	11th–12th century	Dzik 2006, p. 32

CHAPTER 7
REOPENING GRAVES IN EARLY MEDIEVAL POLAND

1. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

The idea of reopening graves with the intention of obtaining valuable commodities or to interact with the dead has existed since early prehistory and has been practiced by various societies all around the world.[1] While in modern times grave disturbance is often persecuted and considered a taboo, in the past such acts could be sanctioned by special customs or religion and were not always regarded as having negative undertones.[2]

Over the last decade or so, early medieval grave disturbance has become an increasingly popular topic of study; a number of scholars have built their careers on thoroughly exploring the multiple facets of this phenomenon among different past societies, especially in Anglo-Saxon England and Viking Age Scandinavia, but also elsewhere in Europe and beyond.[3] Apart from numerous new publications, special conferences devoted specifically to grave disturbances are being organised[4] and an international research group has been established.[5] Although the phenomenon of reopening graves in Merovingian Europe and Viking Age Scandinavia has been given considerable scholarly attention, research into grave disturbance in Poland is still at a nascent stage.[6] This chapter seeks to summarise some of its latest advancements and identify new trajectories for future inquiries.

2. REOPENED GRAVES IN EARLY MEDIEVAL POLAND: SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES

Early medieval grave disturbance has only recently begun to attract attention from Polish historians and archaeologists. Although a relatively wide range of potentially reopened graves had been found in the twentieth century, past scholars often misunderstood the true nature of their discoveries and had problems interpreting them. As a result, many publications released during that time mentioned graves that had been allegedly 'destroyed' or 'emptied' but without discussing them in detail. Some studies also remarked on so-called 'partial burials', containing only selected and disarticulated parts of the skeleton, but again their interpretations were very limited or non-existent. In reassessing these different types of 'atypical' graves today, it has become clear that many of them could have actually been reopened in the past with the intention of manipulating or removing whole bodies or body parts. Before we go into further detail, however, and discuss the different variants of grave disturbance in early medieval Poland, let us start with a brief overview of the history of Polish research into these phenomena.

Initial attempts to interpret the meaning of the practice of reopening graves in early medieval Poland were made in 1937, when Zdzisław Rajewski noticed the occurrence of so-called 'partial burials' (Polish *pochówki cząstkowe*).[7] Thinking that they could be associated with people who had died in battle or whose body parts had been cut off and taken as trophies, he considered them to be reflections of very ancient funerary customs. A few decades after Rajewski's publication, the phenomenon of partial burials was taken up yet again, albeit very briefly, in the works of scholars including Maria Miśkiewicz[8] and Krzysztof Wachowski.[9] In his analysis of funerary practices from Silesia, Wachowski mentioned several examples of partial burials, but his major focus was on discoveries of graves containing single skulls (without postcranial skeletons) from places like Byczyna, Chróścina and Opole-Nowa Wieś Królewska (for further details see Chapter 5).[10] He also noticed the occurrence of empty graves in several Silesian cemeteries and argued that they may have originally contained bodies which decomposed completely in the course of time, or alternatively that they were not graves *per se*, but rather traces of some other human activity.[11]

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[1] For an excellent interdisciplinary and cross-cultural overview of the phenomenon of grave disturbance, see Kümmel 2009.

[2] For early studies into the phenomenon of grave disturbance in different parts of Europe and beyond, see Jankuhn, Nehlsen, Roth 1978; Pauli 1981; Brendalsmo, Røthe 1992; Gjerpe 2007.

[3] See, for example, Aspöck 2005; 2011; Klevnäs 2007; 2013; 2015a; 2015b; 2015c; 2016; Soma 2007; Erna Þórarinsdóttir 2008; van Haperen 2010; 2013; 2015; Bill, Daly 2012; Dobos 2014; Noterman 2011; 2015; Zintl 2012.

[4] See, for example, Gardeła, Kajkowski 2015b.

[5] For more details about this group and its ongoing projects, see http://reopenedgraves.eu/

[6] See, Gardeła, Kajkowski, Szczepanik 2015; Gardeła in press a.

[7] Rajewski 1937, p. 57.

Until recently, there was hardly any wider interest in early medieval grave disturbance in Polish archaeology, but it is worth mentioning that in the mid and late twentieth century, several archaeologists occasionally noted the problem of reopened graves in their publications.[12] For example, while discussing early medieval inhumation cemeteries in Central Poland, Kufel-Dzierzgowska observed that an inhumation grave discovered at Brzeg contained two individuals, one of whom was added sometime after the original funeral and after the first body had completely skeletonised.[13] Regrettably, she did not try to explain why such an act was performed.

The problem of empty graves was also touched upon in Jadwiga Bronicka-Rauhut's monograph of the early medieval cemetery at Czersk in Masovia.[14] She interpreted one of them as a cenotaph or symbolic grave, possibly belonging to a man who had died in battle and whose body could not be brought home. Although they attempted to offer interpretations, none of the abovementioned scholars tried to explore the finds from Poland in a broader perspective and in the context of the diverse inter-cultural phenomenon of grave reopening.

In the early years of the twenty-first century Anna Wrzesińska and Jacek Wrzesiński discussed several variants of reopened graves from the cemetery at Dziekanowice in Greater Poland.[15] As will be shown below, many of these acts appear to have been conducted with the intention of adding consecutive bodies to pre-existing graves, although there were several different ways of dealing with the remains of the initially buried individual. The Wrzesińscy argued that these customs may have resulted from a lack of space for new and separate graves. Although this interpretation may indeed be correct in some cemeteries – especially those which were used over longer periods of time – it is too much of a simplification to see all cases of reopened graves in this way.

An alternative and highly sensationalist approach to grave disturbances in early medieval Poland was offered in 2004 by Przemysław Żydok, who considered them to be associated with ritual acts intended to annihilate revenants or vampires. Similar to many other scholars who dealt with atypical burials in Poland, he failed to provide solid arguments to substantiate this view and, as will be shown below, his ideas can be easily challenged.[16]

The practice of grave disturbance in the Early Middle Ages has only recently become the subject of detailed study in Poland. The urgent need to add nuance to previous interpretations by conducting more comprehensive analyses of reopened graves was first signalled in a paper devoted to double burials, written by Gardeła and Kajkowski in 2014.[17] One year later, a preliminary study of early medieval grave disturbances in Poland was published by Gardeła, Kajkowski and Szczepanik, in a volume based on the second instalment of the Interdisciplinary International Meetings 'Motifs through the Ages'.[18] Aiming to provide an overview of grave disturbance in Poland, and at the same time to identify and trace some recurring patterns of this phenomenon, their publication surveyed selected examples of reopened graves from cemeteries dating between the late tenth and thirteenth centuries in Greater Poland, Masovia, Chełmno land, Kuyavia, Pomerania and Lesser Poland.[19]

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[8] Miśkiewicz 1967, pp. 120–122, 128–129.

[9] Wachowski 1975, pp. 29–30.

[10] Wachowski 1975, pp. 29–30.

[11] Wachowski 1975, p. 30.

[12] See, for example, Kufel-Dzierzgowska 1975, p. 375; Krzyszowski 1992, p. 86.

[13] Kufel-Dzierzgowska 1975, p. 375.

[14] Bronicka-Rauhut 1998, pp. 17, 49.

[15] Wrzesińska, Wrzesiński 2001, pp. 435, 439–440, 441; 2002, p. 82; 2003, p. 283; Wrzesińscy 1993, p. 170.

[16] Żydok 2004, p. 44.

[17] Gardeła, Kajkowski 2014, pp. 114–115.

[18] The whole conference was devoted to the motif of grave disturbances and re-use of human bones – see Gardeła, Kajkowski 2015b.

This chapter builds on and expands these earlier analyses, providing a synthetic overview of the archaeological evidence for grave disturbance in Poland and offering new interpretations of the different motivations that may have led early medieval people to reopen graves and manipulate their contents. It must be observed, however, that studies and interpretations of grave disturbance in early medieval Poland are significantly hampered due to the often laconic character of older publications.[20] The available documentation of some graves does not always allow the researcher to determine with certainty whether they were reopened intentionally in the early medieval period, or whether the damage or manipulation to their contents occurred as a result of other natural or anthropogenic processes, such as the intrusion of animals or modern agricultural activities. Therefore, due to the considerable methodological and source-critical difficulties in distinguishing between intentional and unintentional disturbances, this chapter will not attempt to debate each and every case of a potentially disturbed grave from Poland (as to do so would require a separate monograph), but will instead focus on those examples for which there is no doubt that a premeditated act of reopening was attempted. In search of examples of intentional grave disturbances I have surveyed cemetery reports from Central Poland,[21] Greater Poland,[22] Pomerania,[23] Silesia,[24] Masovia[25] and Lesser Poland.[26]

National patterning of reopened graves

Evidence for intentional grave disturbance in early medieval cemeteries is found in practically all parts of Poland, but it is difficult to assess whether there were any particular areas where it was performed with greater frequency (**Fig. 7.1**). As mentioned above, a number of disturbed graves have been found at Dziekanowice,[27] but we should not forget that this is an exceptional site and one of the largest cemeteries in Greater Poland, with over one thousand inhumations. Therefore, the considerable number of disturbances in this cemetery cannot be taken to imply that reopenings were performed more frequently in this area – it is simply the size of the site that increases the number and probability of reopenings. Other early medieval cemeteries in Poland that have been surveyed in this study typically contain from one to just a few examples of reopened graves. Generally speaking, and in comparison with the archaeological evidence from Western or Northern Europe which will be summarised further below, it seems that in the period between the late tenth and thirteenth centuries grave disturbance was very rarely practised in Poland.[28]

Spatial location of reopened graves within cemeteries

As in the case of other variants of atypical burials discussed in this monograph, a brief remark must be made on the spatial location of disturbed graves in early medieval cemeteries in Poland. Based on the available evidence, it seems that graves that were reopened could be located in any part of the cemetery – no clear patterns emerge. It is also worth noting that, in contrast to other types of atypical burials discussed in the previous chapters of this book (e.g. prone burials, stoned burials and decapitated burials), none of the reopened graves were located in boundary areas or on the margins of cemeteries.

3. VARIANTS OF REOPENED GRAVES IN EARLY MEDIEVAL POLAND

Based on the aforementioned study by Gardeła, Kajkowski and Szczepanik,[29] and further surveys of archaeological materials conducted for the purposes

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[19] Gardeła, Kajkowski, Szczepanik 2015.

[20] Similar source-critical problems often pertain to the archaeological materials from Anglo-Saxon England and Scandinavia as well.

[21] E.g. Nadolski, Abramowicz, Poklewski 1959; Kufel-Dzierzgowska 1975; 1986; Abramek 1980.

[22] E.g. the cemeteries at Dziekanowice, Giecz, Gołuń, Koninko, Lubochnia, Młodzikowo, Podrzewie, Poznań-Garbary-Stawna Street, Poznań-Śródka and Pyzdry – see Leciejewicz, Łosiński 1960; Krzyszowski 1992; 1995; Wrzesińscy 1992; 1993; Pawlak 1995, pp. 112–123; 1998; Krenz, Stępnik 1996; Wyrwa 1996; Indycka 2000; Wrzesińska, Wrzesiński 2001; 2002; 2003; Pawlak, Pawlak 2007; 2015; Stępnik 2007; 2009a; 2009b; Jagielska 2010; Wrzesiński, Wyrwa 2011; Stępnik, Stępnik 2013; Andrałojć 2015.

[23] E.g. Malinowska-Łazarczyk 1982; 1985; Porzeziński 2006; 2008 and other more recent studies.

[24] E.g. Wachowski 1975 and other more recent studies.

[25] E.g. Kordala 2006 and other more recent studies.

[26] E.g. Zoll-Adamikowa 1966; 1971 and other more recent studies.

[27] Graves 79–79a/94; 13–14/95; 50–50a/95; 40a–40b/96; 25–26/97; 51–79/99.

[28] A similar view is also shared by Sikora 2015, p. 267.

[29] Gardeła, Kajkowski, Szczepanik 2015.

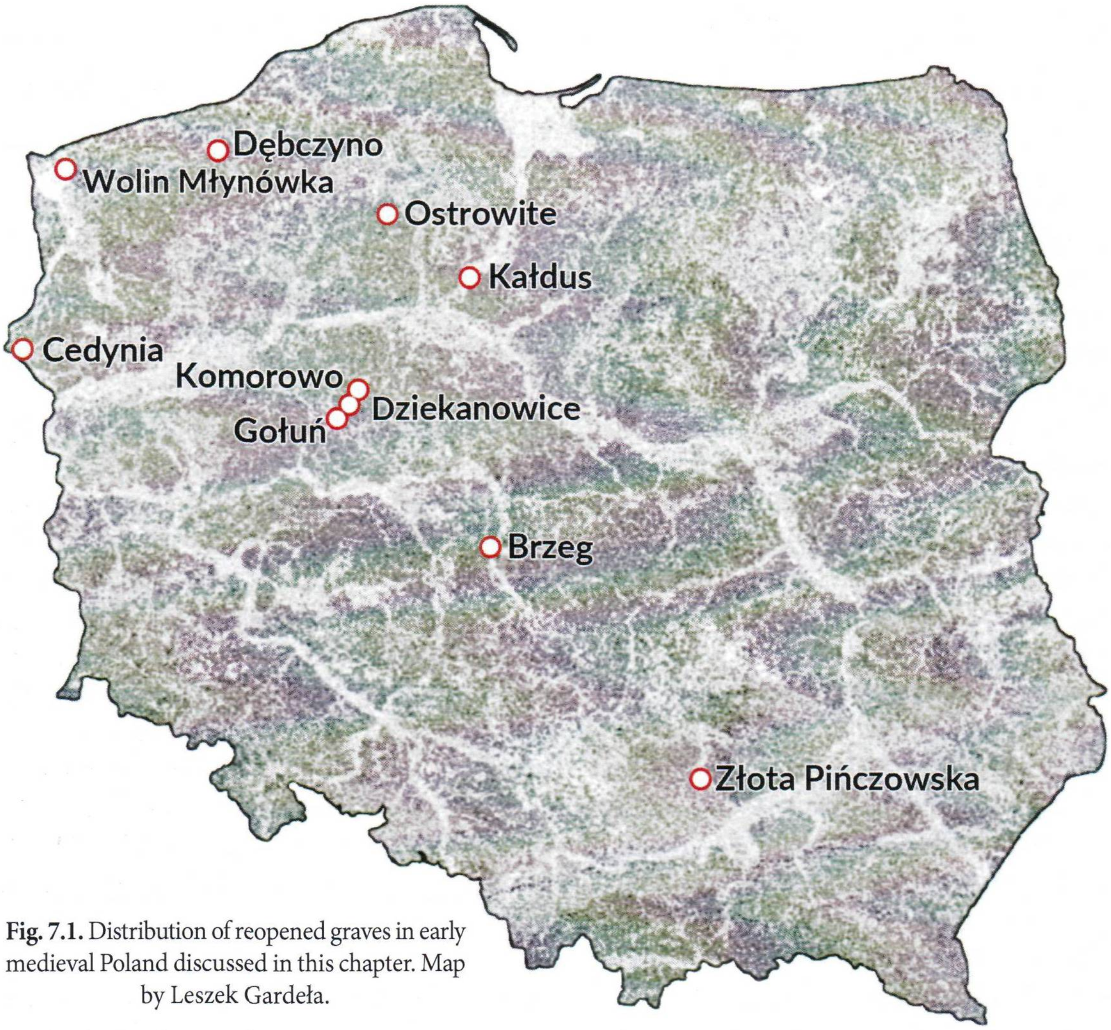

Fig. 7.1. Distribution of reopened graves in early medieval Poland discussed in this chapter. Map by Leszek Gardeła.

of this monograph, it can be argued that, when the evidence for grave disturbance in early medieval Poland is taken collectively, it is possible to isolate three distinctive variants of this practice:

- Reopening graves with the intention to add further bodies
- Reopening graves with the desire to remove particular body parts
- Reopening graves to maim, immobilise or annihilate the dead

Another variant that could potentially be considered a type of grave disturbance is the reuse of prehistoric graves or mounds for early medieval burials; this theme, however, will not be taken up in the present study, but will be discussed separately in another publication.[30] Below, we shall examine the most explicit examples from each of the three major categories.

Adding bodies to pre-existing graves

Adding further bodies to pre-existing graves appears to have been the most frequent reason for grave disturbance in early medieval Poland.[31] In archaeological parlance, this practice is sometimes known as 'secondary burial'.[32] This term, however, can be misleading, because it is defined and perceived differently depending on the cultural context and historical period.[33] In the case of Neolithic archaeology, for example, 'secondary burial' is understood as a tradition 'whose most important aspect is that the deceased is not considered properly buried until a second ceremony is held, when there is sorting, cleansing and/or reburial of the bones'.[34] With regard to early medieval graves from Poland, however, the English term 'secondary burial' (Polish *wtórny pochówek*) is used simply to indicate that a pre-existing grave was reopened with the intention of adding another body.[35] To avoid terminological confusion, in the following discussion I will instead refer to such funerary phenomena as 'consecutive burials'.[36]

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[30] One example of such a monument re-use at Koźle in Silesia is discussed by Wachowski 1975, p. 31. Here, an eleventh-century inhumation was dug into a Bronze Age mound. On this matter see also Kurtz 1936, p. 62.

[31] Gardeła, Kajkowski, Szczepanik 2015; Sikora 2015; Gardeła in press a.

[32] See, for example, Sikora 2015.

[33] See, for example, Metcalf, Huntington 1991; Larsson 2003, pp. 162, 229–230; Aspöck 2005, p. 227.

The best documented, most numerous and most varied evidence for consecutive burials has been recorded in the cemetery at Dziekanowice in Greater Poland. It is possible to distinguish at least two variants of this practice and due to good preservation of archaeological remains we can reconstruct how the acts of reopening were conducted (**Fig. 7.2**):

- Variant 1: The grave was reopened in such a way that the skeletal remains of the initially buried individual were undisturbed during the process of digging. Afterwards, the original grave pit was expanded and the second body was laid in a flexed position parallel to the initially buried individual (e.g. grave 13–14/95).
- Variant 2: The grave was reopened and the skeletal remains of the initially buried individual were collected, moved and piled at the foot end of the pit (e.g. graves 51–79/99, 50–50a/95, 40a–40b/96). The second body was then buried in the same grave pit, in exactly the place where the first individual originally lay.

It is interesting to note that in all graves of the second type, the initially buried person was *always* male, while the added individual was *always* female. The same tendencies are known from a range of other sites in Poland, which may suggest a consistently repeated ritual practice. Further examples of this custom have been recorded in the cemeteries at Komorowo (Greater Poland Voivodeship), Wolin Młynówka (West Pomeranian Voivodeship), Brzeg (Central Poland), Złota Pińczowska (Świętokrzyskie Voivodeship) and Ostrowite (Pomeranian Voivodeship), and they all deserve our attention.

We begin with the early medieval cemetery at Komorowo in Greater Poland where a very interesting example of a 'consecutive burial' (graves 21–22) was found (**Fig. 7.3**).[37] The skeletal remains and grave goods were relatively well preserved, and we can therefore attempt to reconstruct the different stages of the funerary scenario. The initially buried individual was an adult man whose grave contained two iron spurs, as well as a small wooden bucket decorated with iron sheet. After some time had passed, the grave was reopened and, during the process, the bones of the man and the objects that originally accompanied him were moved to the foot end of the pit and piled together to make space for an adult woman. She was buried in a supine position, with her right arm extended along her side and her left hand placed on her pelvis. There were no objects accompanying her in the grave, or at least none that have survived. This situation closely resembles those from Dziekanowice discussed above, the only difference being that the man's grave was furnished with riding equipment (spurs). This case clearly demonstrates that whoever reopened the grave was not interested in acquiring grave goods, since these were carefully redeposited during the consecutive burial of the female.

In the cemetery at Wolin Młynówka in Western Pomerania, there are number of graves that appear to have been disturbed. However, the preservation of the graves and their archaeological documentation make it difficult to determine whether the manipulations were intentional or due to post-depositional factors, such as the intrusion of animals or modern destruction of the site.[38] In his monograph, Wojtasik notes that twenty-one single skulls without post-cranial skeletons were found in the cemetery, arguing that they might have originated from disturbed graves.[39] Nevertheless, as mentioned already in Chapter 5, it is probable that at least some of these finds (e.g. grave 152(293)) could actually represent intentional burials or deposits of skulls alone. It remains unclear whether these skulls were removed from pre-existing graves to be buried singly, or whether the practice of burying skulls was a result of other acts. Unfortunately, very little information is provided about these skull burials and their plans or photographs have not been published. In the case of grave 152(293), Wojtasik merely notes that it contained a single skull of a young female who had been buried in a pit filled with gravel. He adds that near the skull were two iron nails, but their purpose is unknown – it is unlikely that they were used to nail the skull to a post.[40]

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[34] Larsson 2003, p. 162.

[35] This is how it is understood by Sikora 2015, for example.

[36] See also Gardeła in press a.

[37] Malinowski, Malinowski, Lorkiewicz 1994, pp. 22–24, 33.

[38] The eastern part of the hill where the cemetery at Wolin Młynówka is located was used in modern times as a sand quarry and a place for the production of gravel. See Wojtasik 1968, p. 225.

[39] Wojtasik 1968, p. 207.

[40] Wojtasik 1968, p. 83.

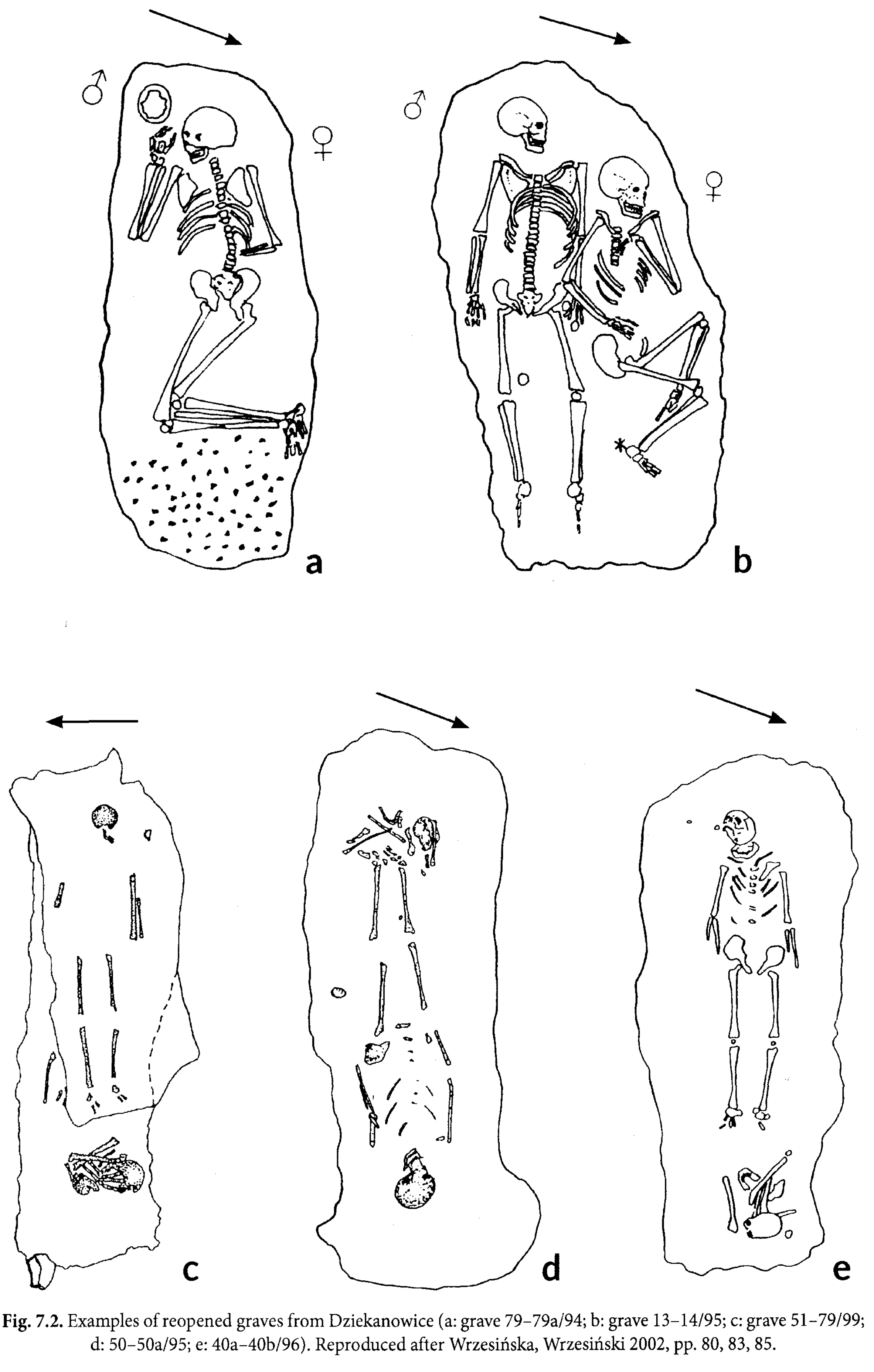

Fig. 7.2. Examples of reopened graves from Dziekanowice (a: grave 79–79a/94; b: grave 13–14/95; c: grave 51–79/99; d: 50–50a/95; e: 40a–40b/96). Reproduced after Wrzesińska, Wrzesiński 2002, pp. 80, 83, 85.

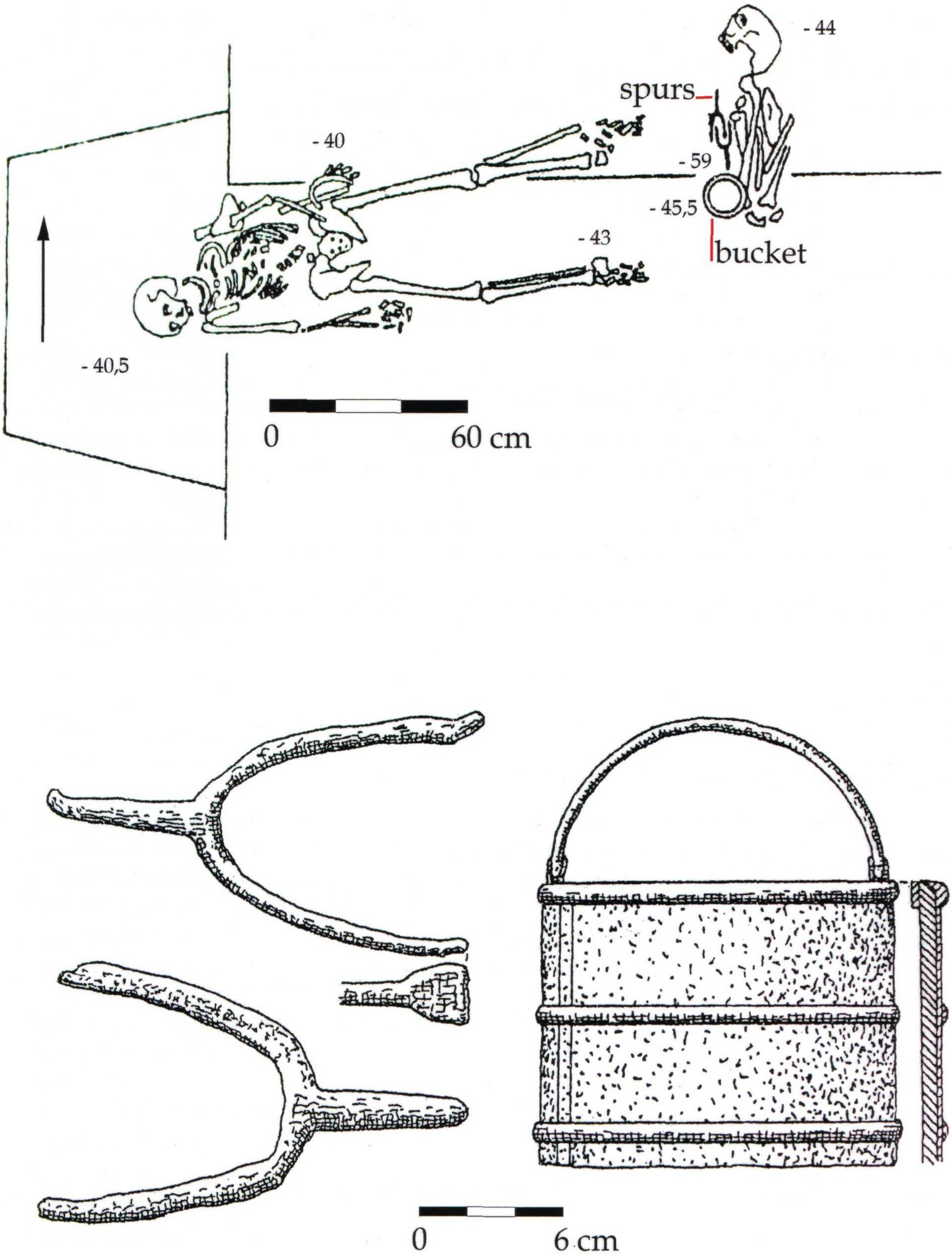
- 44
spurs
- 40
- 59
- 45,5
- 43
bucket
- 40,5
0
60 cm
0
6 cm

Fig. 7.3. Graves 21–22 from Komorowo and the grave goods that accompanied one of the individuals. Reproduced after Malinowski, Malinowski and Lorkiewicz 1994, p. 23.

Speaking of other potential traces of grave disturbance at Wolin Młynówka, it is worth devoting attention to grave 239, which contained traces of a small and empty wooden coffin or chest, only 80cm in length.[41] The interpretation of this grave is difficult – it may have contained the body of a small child which decomposed completely, or alternatively it may have been a cenotaph for a person whose remains were kept elsewhere, or which for some reason could not be obtained for burial. Although no traces of disturbance have been recorded, we might also speculate that at some point in time the body was removed from the coffin and reburied somewhere else.

The most evident example of intentional reopening in the cemetery at Wolin Młynówka is seen in grave 84(197ab), which contained the skeletal remains of two individuals, a male and a female (**Fig. 7.4**). The woman lay in a supine position and at her feet was a pile of bones belonging to the man. The arrangement of the bones is strikingly similar to one of the varieties of disturbance that have earlier been observed at Dziekanowice and Komorowo. There is a strong possibility that this was originally a single grave of a man, to which a female individual was added after his soft tissue had decomposed. In his report, Wojtasik observes that a number of animal bones and small undetermined objects were found in the fill of the grave pit.[42] These may represent accidental inclusions that ended up in the grave during backfilling, but it is not unlikely that they were used as part of some special ritual.

Grave 71 from the cemetery at Brzeg in Central Poland also bears a close resemblance to the consecutive burials from Dziekanowice, Komorowo and Wolin Młynówka.[43] Here, the body of a female was added to accompany the man and, in this process, his disarticulated bones were moved and piled up at the foot end of the pit.

Yet another example of a consecutive burial resembling those discussed above is known from the cemetery at Złota Pińczowska in Lesser Poland.[44] Grave 107 (**Fig. 7.5**, **Fig. 7.6** and **Fig. 7.7**) contained two individuals – a young girl and an adult man, both placed in one coffin. The girl was around 12 years old when she died and was buried in a supine position.[45] She had as many as twelve temple rings distributed around her head, a small green bead around her neck and an iron knife by her left side. At her feet were the remains of a wooden bucket and the piled up bones of a man, as well as an iron knife. In a recent re-evaluation of this grave, an attempt has been made to reconstruct the sequence of events which could have led to such an unusual arrangement of skeletal remains.[46] It has been demonstrated that the coffin originally contained the body of the man, who may have been accompanied by a wooden bucket and a knife. After some time had passed and the man's corpse had skeletonised, the grave was reopened and the body of the young girl was added. This situation – the consecutive interment of a female individual in the grave of a man – is reminiscent of cases that have been recorded in the cemeteries at Dziekanowice, Komorowo, Wolin Młynówka and Brzeg, which have already been discussed above. The only difference is that, in Złota Pińczowska, the bodies were laid in a coffin and that the added female was a relatively young girl. In the original report from the excavations at Złota Pińczowska, Miśkiewicz interpreted grave 107 in a rather sensationalist way – as evidence of a human sacrifice in which the man was killed and cut up to accompany the young girl.[47] In light of new research, this interpretation can no longer be maintained.

The examples examined above, where the originally buried individual is *always* male and the added individual is *always* female, are remarkably consistent in their appearance and in the way in which the human remains are treated. This implies that there may have been a very specific idea which led to performing burials in this way. Unfortunately, due to the lack of textual sources that could reveal the meaning of these practices with clarity, we are forced to speculate.

One possibility, previously suggested in several articles by Wrzesińska and Wrzesiński, is that these graves belong to married couples and express a desire to bury two lovers together in the same pit.[48] This interpretation could perhaps be substantiated in the case of Dziekanowice, Komorowo, Wolin Młynówka and Brzeg, where all the deceased are adults, but it is less likely in the case of the young girl from Złota Pińczowska.

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[41] Wojtasik 1968, p. 210.

[42] Wojtasik 1968, p. 46.

[43] Kufel-Dzierzgowska 1975, p. 375; 1986, p. 312. See also Sikora 2015, p. 279.

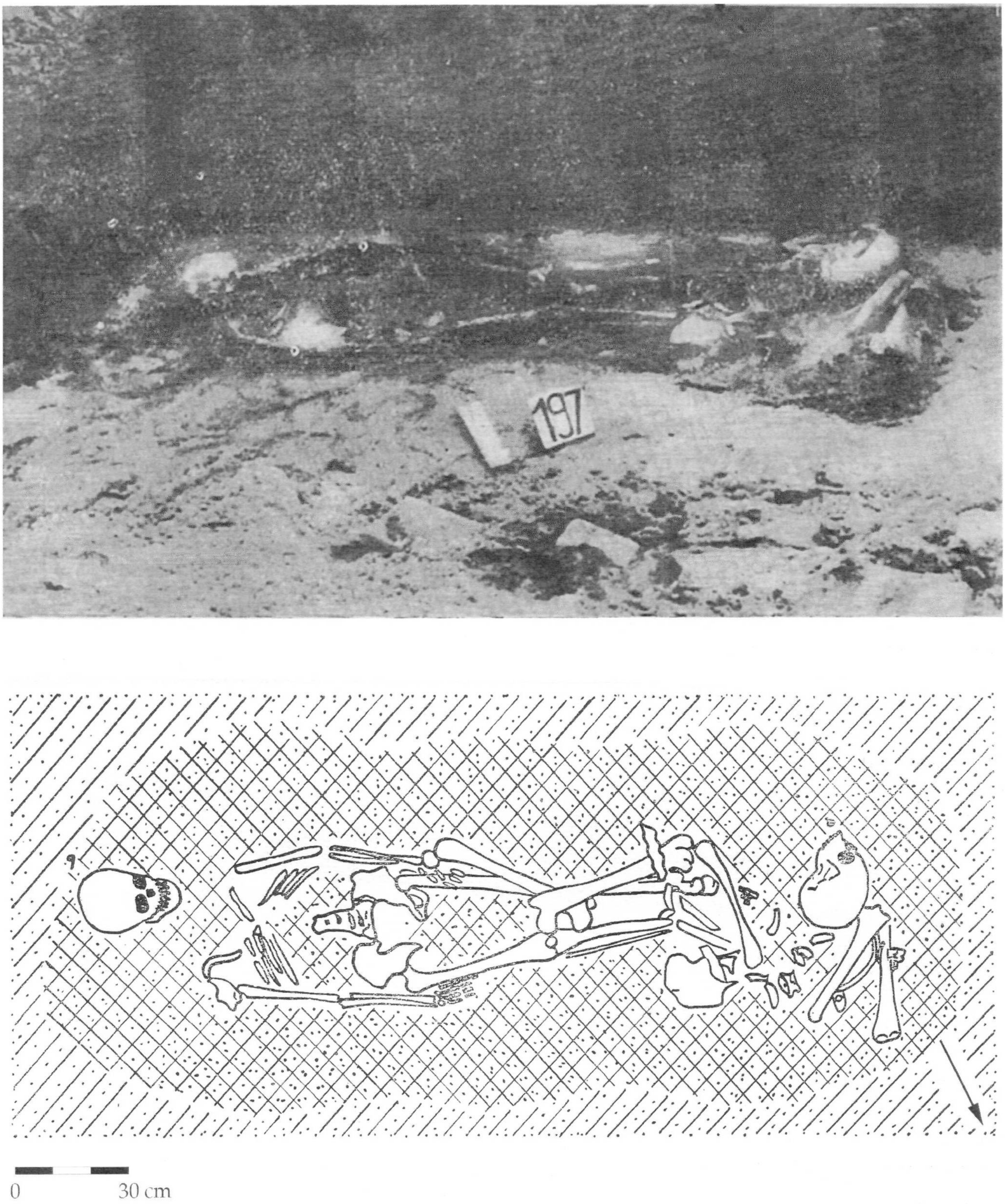
[44] Miśkiewicz 1967, pp. 120–121, 129; 2010, p. 144; Stanaszek 2016a, p, 92.

[45] Miśkiewicz 2010, p. 144.

[46] Gardeła, Kajkowski, Szczepanik 2015, pp. 243–246.

[47] Miśkiewicz 1967, p. 129.

[48] Wrzesińska, Wrzesiński 2001; 2002; 2003.



Fig, 7.4. Reopened grave 84(197ab) from Wolin Młynówka. Reproduced after Wojtasik 1968, p. 46, plate XXXV.

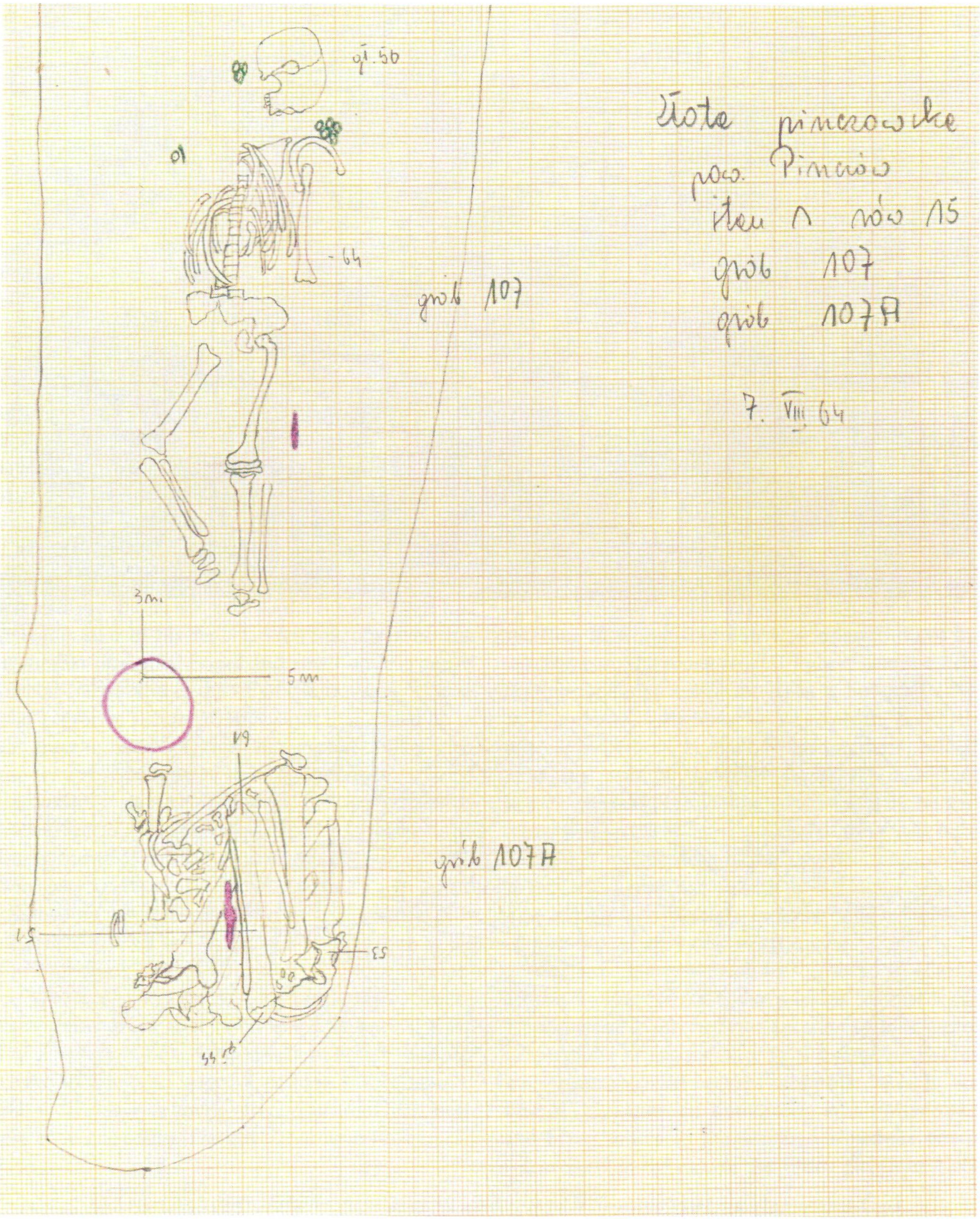

Złota pińczowska
pow. Pińczów
stan 1 rów 15
grób 107
grób 107A
7. VIII 64
gł. 50
-64
grób 107
3m
5m
grób 107A
LS
ES
33

Fig. 7.5. Original plan of grave 107 from Złota Pińczowska. Collections of Państwowe Muzeum Archeologiczne. Used by kind permission.

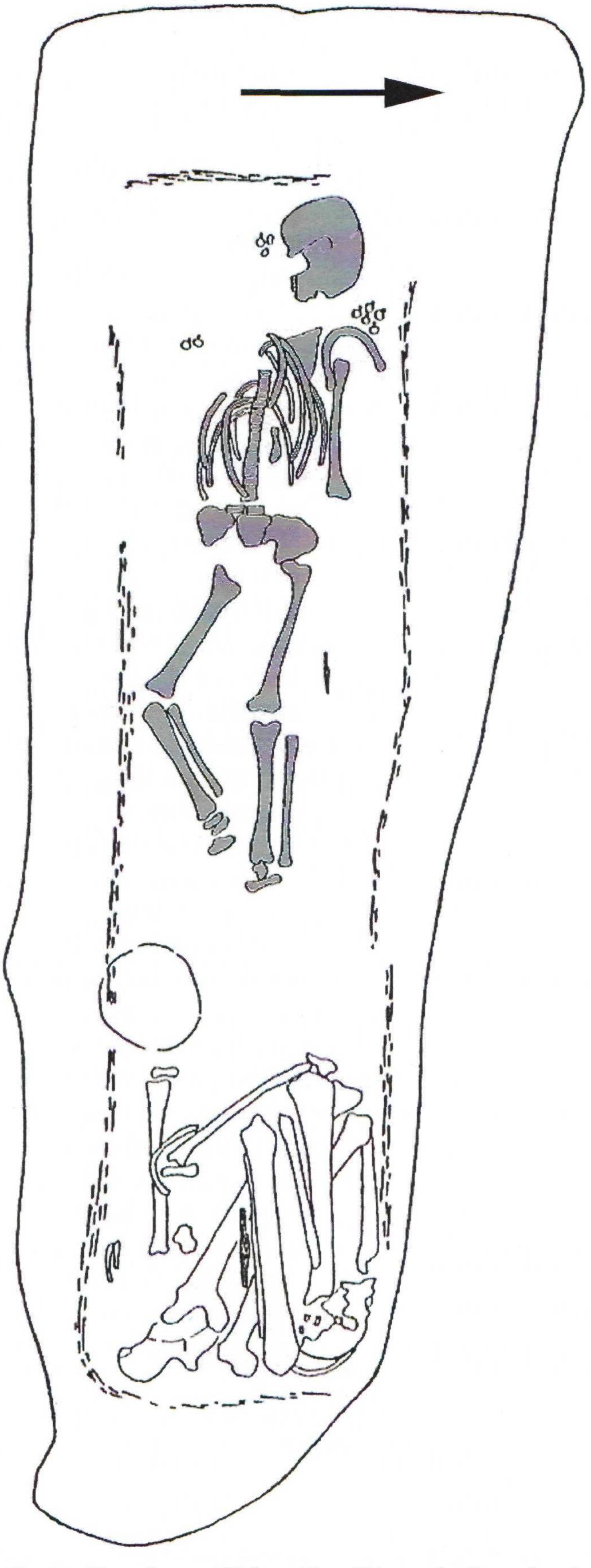


Fig. 7.6. Plan of grave 107 from Złota Pińczowska. Reproduced after Miśkiewicz 1967, p. 104.

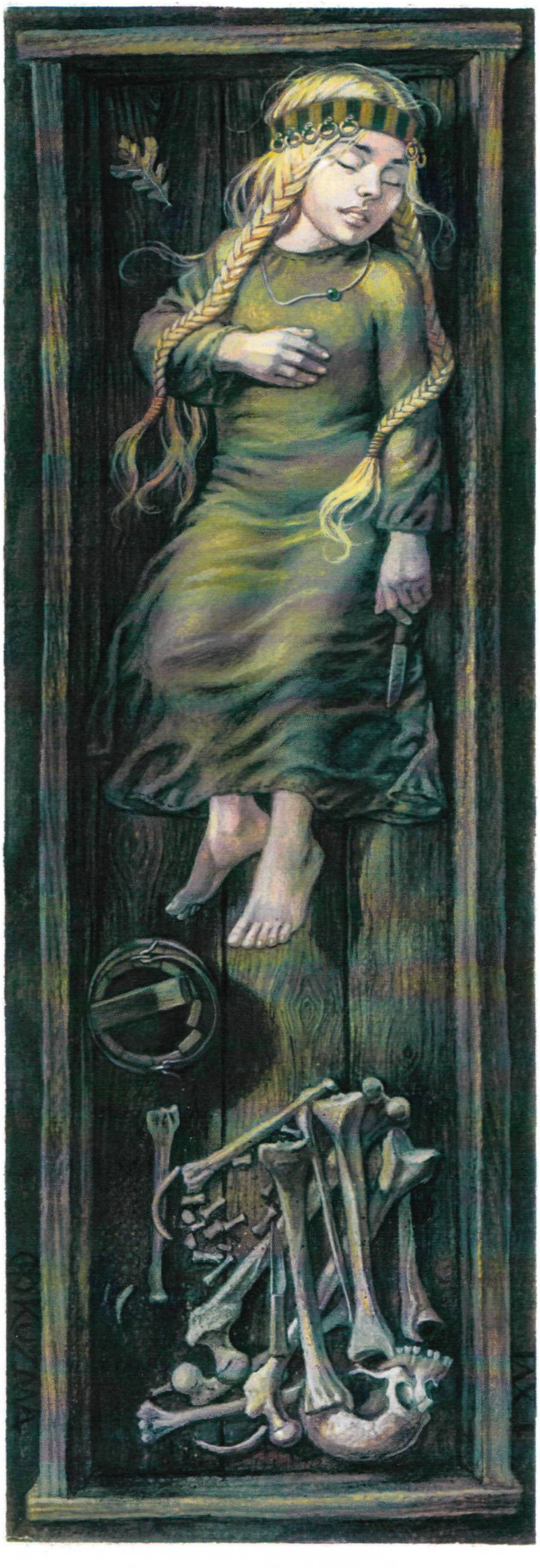


Fig. 7.7. Artistic reconstruction of grave 107 from Złota Pińczowska. Illustration by Mirosław Kuźma. Copyright by Leszek Gardeła and Mirosław Kuźma.

In interpreting this puzzling funerary custom, it is vital to pay special attention to the area in the grave where the bones of the initially buried individual were moved – as we have seen, this is consistently the foot end of the pit. One immediate impression we might have is that placing human bones at the feet of another person signals some form of subservience or submission (in this case it would imply submission of a man to a woman). However, this reading may not necessarily be correct.

In order to better understand the meanings of foot end spaces in Slavic early medieval graves, it is vital to consider more closely the kinds of objects are usually buried there. Interestingly, among the items most commonly deposited at the feet of the deceased in Slavic cemeteries in Poland are vessels and occasionally weapons, knives and horse-riding equipment (e.g. spurs and stirrups) as well as various small utensils, perhaps with an amuletic function (e.g. ceramic eggs) (see Chapter 2).[49]

Wooden buckets, bowls or ceramic pots (some of which may have contained food or drink) constitute a particularly interesting category of objects deposited at the feet of the deceased. In a recent article, Kurasiński[50] has provided an extensive analysis of the meanings of stave-built buckets in Slavic funerary contexts, and has argued for their important ritual role, perhaps associated with feasting and the cult of the dead.[51] He observes that the contents of these vessels may have been intended to nourish the deceased on their way to the Otherworld. If this was indeed the case – and there are good reasons to think so – then the foot end of the grave could be seen as a space designated for rather special 'gifts', potentially intended for an otherworldly journey. Perhaps in light of this it could be argued that the practice of piling the bones of deceased men at the feet of women (some of whom may have been their partners in life), was an act through which the mourners wanted to provide a guide and/or guardian who would lead them on their journey to the afterlife. Alternatively, the space at the foot end could be the space *of the Otherworld*, intended for food and individuals that already belong there. All this is of course pure speculation – there are no extant medieval textual sources that could support this idea, although some hints can potentially be found in Slavic ethnography.[52] Regardless of the chosen interpretation, it is vital to emphasise that in each of the cases examined above, the bones appear to have been piled in very orderly manner and with considerable care, which implies a sense of affection rather than the negative feelings which one would associate with, for example, the fear of revenants. Given this, I find it difficult to accept the previous views of Miśkiewicz or Żydok, who argued that consecutive burials of the type discussed here reflected human sacrifices or anti-revenant practices.[53]

Before we move on to examine further variants of reopened graves in Early Medieval Poland, it is necessary to turn our attention to yet another case of disturbance that has been discovered very recently and extensively discussed by Jerzy Sikora.[54] The grave in question (grave 24) was found in the early medieval cemetery at Ostrowite in Pomerania, and is dated between the eleventh and twelfth centuries (**Fig. 7.8**). It was a chamber grave, probably covered with a mound, originally containing the body of a child or a young woman interred in a wooden coffin. The deceased was accompanied by a bucket and a knife with a sheath with copper alloy fittings. After some time, the grave was reopened and the disarticulated bones were moved to the foot end of the coffin. As in the aforementioned case of the grave from Komorowo, it seems that none of the grave goods were removed in the process of reopening.[55] The second individual added to the grave was of mature or senior age and was interred in the same coffin, together with a knife, a bucket and a bronze bowl. This grave is unique in Poland with regard to its construction and wealth of grave goods. Although we do not know the sex of the deceased, it is likely that it was an exception to the pattern established above – i.e. the graves of men that were reopened to add bodies of females.[56] Instead, it might be the case that the originally buried individual was a female and that the added person was a man. Although grave 24 is special in many regards, it is noteworthy that it is not the only reopened chamber grave from Poland; another possible

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[49] For general remarks on the positioning of different kinds of objects in early medieval graves in Poland, see Miśkiewicz 1969; Kufel-Dzierzgowska 1975, p. 379.

[50] Kurasiński 2015a.

[51] For comparative perspectives see Lee 2007; Gardeła 2016b with references.

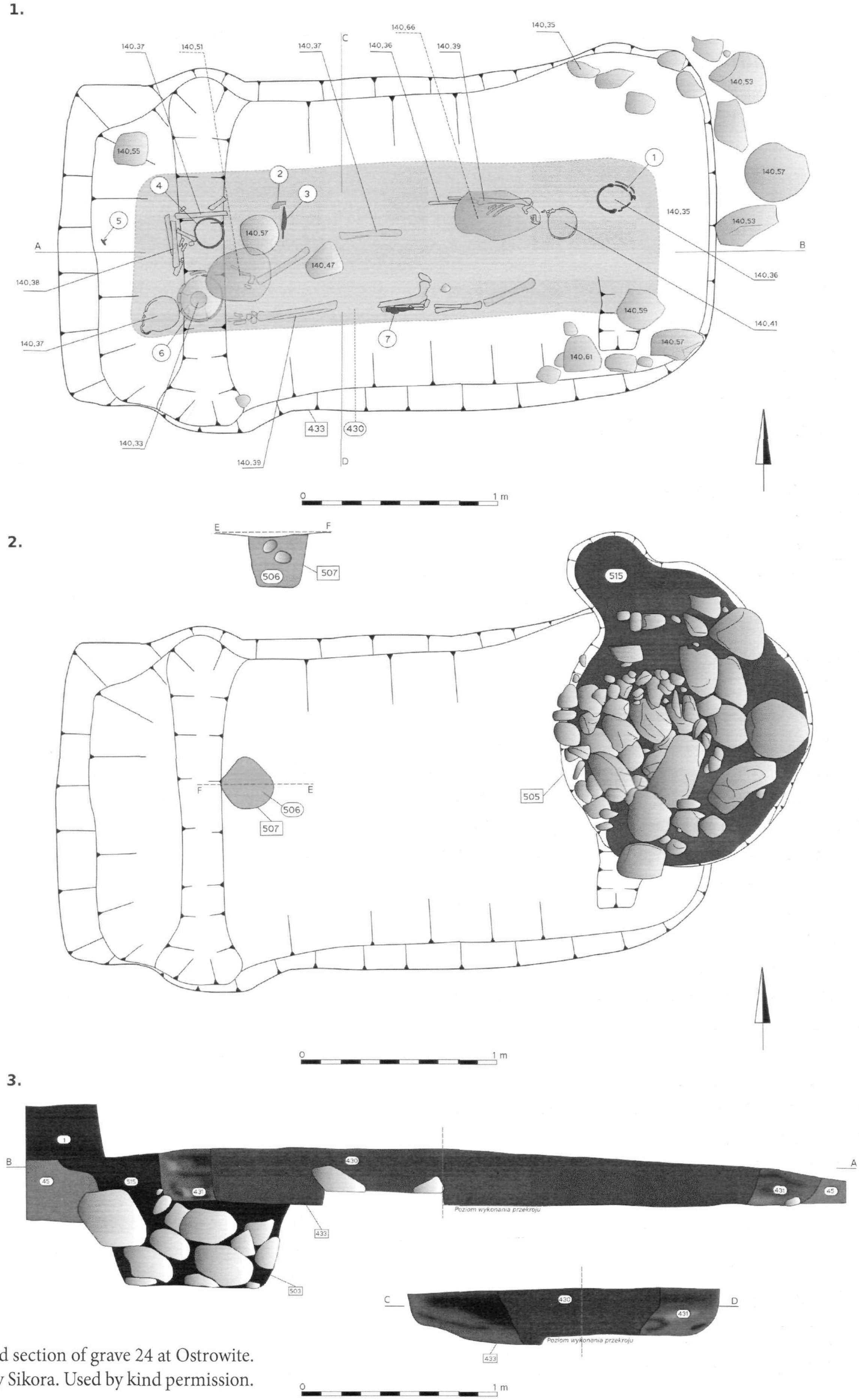
[52] See, for example, Fischer 1921; Biegeleisen 1930.

[53] Miśkiewicz 1967, p. 129; Żydok 2004.

[54] Sikora 2015.

[55] Sikora 2015, p. 278.

[56] Another exceptional case is known from the early medieval cemetery at Gołuń (graves 21–22). A man's body was added to a preexisting grave of another man, whose bones were moved to the foot end of the pit. See Andrałojć 2015, pp. 38–39, 121–122, 141.


1.
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506
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505
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507
0
1 m
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515
431
430
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A
433
503
Poziom wykonania przekroju
C
430
431
D
Poziom wykonania przekroju
433
0
1 m

Fig. 7.8. Plan and section of grave 24 at Ostrowite. Drawing by Jerzy Sikora. Used by kind permission.

case is known from Kałdus (grave 356/02), where a child (*infans* I) lay together with an adult woman whose body was added at a later time.[57]

In addition to the examples of reopened graves with the remains of the initially buried person moved to the foot end of the pit, there are also cases where the bones were moved towards one of the sides of the pit. One grave of this type has been found in Ostrowite (grave 4–5), where Sikora notes that the displacement of the skeletal remains was done in a rather 'chaotic way'.[58] Analogous examples are also known from Czersk (graves 45 and 46), Dobrzyń (graves 157 and 158)[59] and Kałdus (grave 399/03).[60]

(Re)moving bones and objects and maiming the dead

We have now discussed a number of examples in which pre-existing graves were reopened with the intention of adding further bodies. As we have seen, these acts often involved moving the remains of the initially buried individual and redepositing them at the foot end of the pit or coffin. In addition to graves of this type, however, there seem to have been other variants of post-burial manipulations in early medieval cemeteries in Poland. These involved reopening graves with the intention of (re)moving particular body parts, not to make space for another body, but rather with some different idea in mind. Examples of such practices have been noted in, above others, the cemeteries at Cedynia and Dębczyno, both in Western Pomerania. We shall examine them more closely below.

As we have seen in Chapters 5 and 6, there are a number of graves at Cedynia where stones substitute for the heads of the deceased. After reassessing both archival and published materials, I have demonstrated how difficult it is to determine if these people were decapitated before their bodies were committed to the ground, or whether the graves were reopened after the funeral and the heads cut off and then removed from the pit. The prominent location of the Cedynia cemetery in the landscape could suggest that at least some of the individuals buried in a deviant way were criminals whose decapitated heads were displayed (on posts?) on the surface, perhaps serving as a warning against committing unlawful deeds. Regrettably, the extant archaeological materials and the general documentation from the excavations at Cedynia do not provide enough details to confirm this hypothesis.

Leaving these problems aside, let us turn our attention to one of the allegedly decapitated burials from site 2 at Cedynia (grave 789) which I have already briefly mentioned in Chapter 5. The grave belonged to an adult woman (aged 35–40) buried in a supine position with her arms extended along the sides of her body. At the woman's feet (and partly over them) lay a cranium and piled tibias and femurs (**Fig. 7.9** and **Fig. 7.10**).[61] At first glance, the arrangement of skeletal remains in this grave suggests that it may have been reopened – indeed, it looks similar to the disturbed graves that have been recorded at Dziekanowice and elsewhere in Poland. Porzeziński suggests that the woman was decapitated to prevent her from rising as a revenant, but apart from this bold statement he does not provide any further discussion.[62] The interpretative problems with this grave lie in the details of the peculiar bone arrangement. Judging by the site report, it seems that, despite the displacement of the cranium, the mandible of the female remained intact in the head area. This could actually suggest two different interpretative scenarios: 1. the woman could have been decapitated prior to interment and her jaw cut off in the process or 2. the grave was reopened and the cranium was detached (cut or ripped off) from the spine and jaw when the body was fully skeletonised, or in an advanced state of decomposition. There might even be yet another possibility – that the cranium actually belongs to another individual, and that this grave represents an example of consecutive burial similar to those discussed earlier above. At the moment, and without aDNA analyses, it is impossible to determine if the cranium belongs to the female skeleton or not. Unfortunately, without further osteological studies, not much more can be said about this curious case.

Several graves with more evident traces of reopening have been discovered in an early medieval cemetery at Dębczyno in Western Pomerania.[63] Grave 1 held the remains of a mature woman (aged 45–50), and as many as three cuts were dug to access its contents

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[57] Bojarski, Chudziak, Drozd, Koperkiewicz, Kozłowski, Stawska 2010, p. 557; Sikora 2015, p. 284.

[58] Sikora 2015, p. 280.

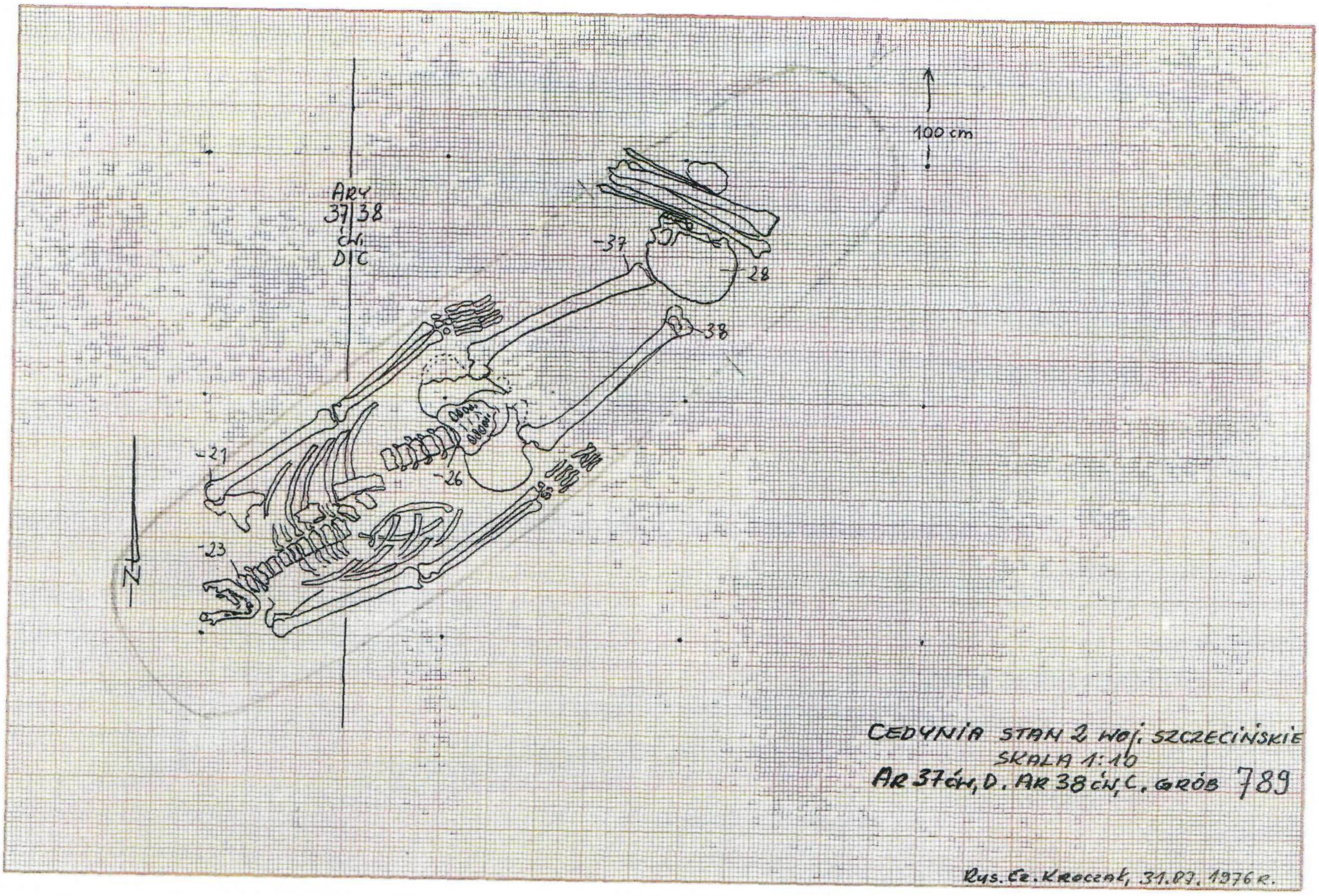
[59] Sikora 2015, pp. 282–283.

[60] Bojarski, Chudziak, Drozd, Koperkiewicz, Kozłowski, Stawska 2010, pp. 320, 572, 575.

[61] Porzeziński 2008, pp. 16, 23, 34.

[62] Porzeziński 2008, p. 16.

[63] Sikorski 2000.


100 cm
ARY
37|38
ćw.
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-37
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N
CEDYNIA STAN 2 woj. SZCZECIŃSKIE
SKALA 1:10
AR 37 ćw, D. AR 38 ćw, C. GRÓB 789
Rys. Cz. Kroczak, 31.07. 1976 R.

Fig. 7.9. Original plan of grave 789 from Cedynia. Collections of Muzeum Regionalne w Cedyni. Used by kind permission.

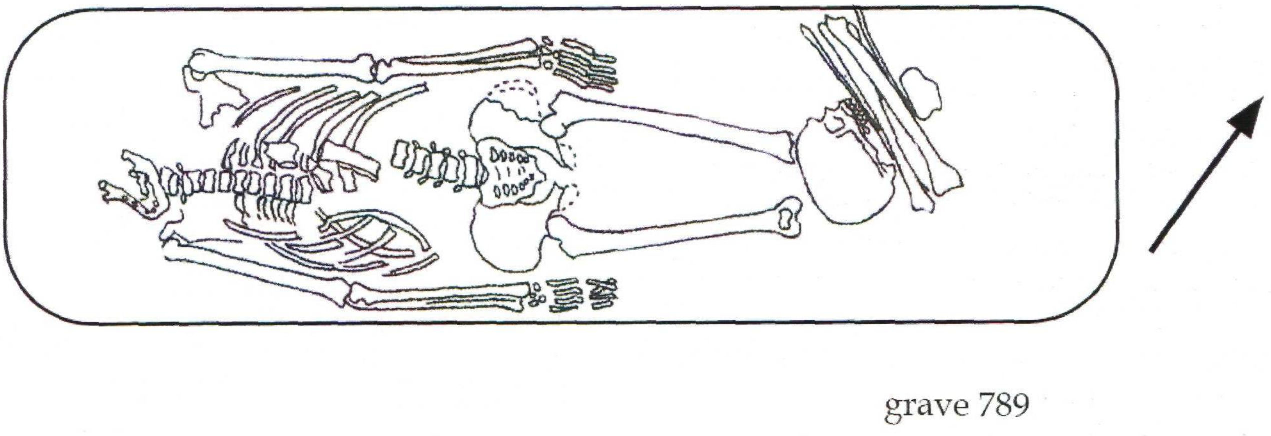

Fig. 7.10. Plan of grave 789 from Cedynia. Reproduced after Porzeziński 2008, 34.

(**Fig. 7.11**). The first was in the head area and was intended to gain access to the woman's head. The head was then removed and placed face down in another cut located above the chest and pelvis. A third cut was dug in the foot end of the grave. The acts of reopening led to the displacement of a number of objects originally buried with the deceased – among them temple rings, a silver coin and an iron knife. It is uncertain whether anything was taken from the grave; it seems that the main intention of those responsible was to remove the head/skull of the deceased. The violent and apparently rapid manner in which the reopening was conducted

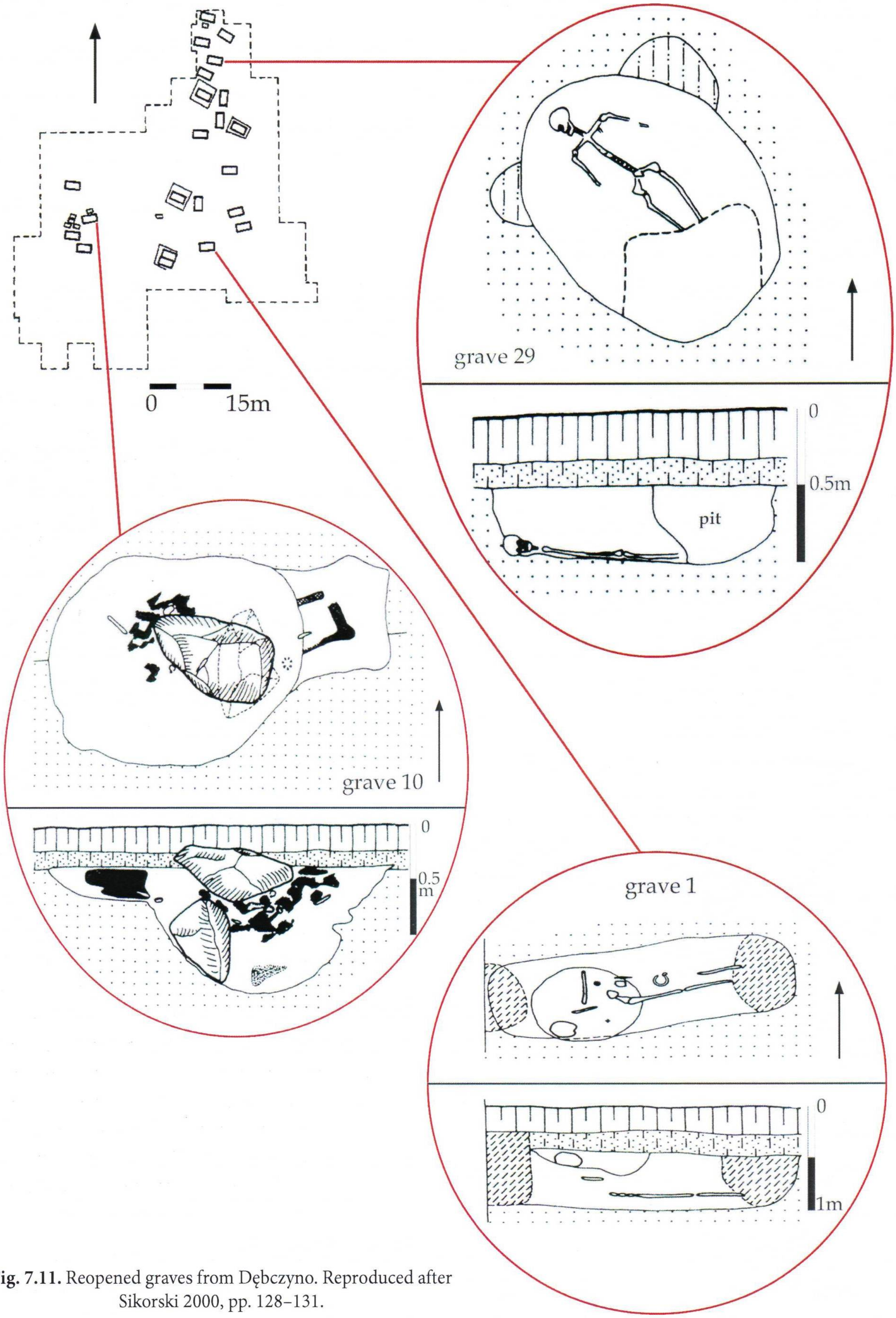
0
15m
grave 29
0
0.5m
pit
grave 10
0
0.5
m
grave 1
0
1m

Fig. 7.11. Reopened graves from Dębczyno. Reproduced after Sikorski 2000, pp. 128–131.

lends support to the interpretation that this case could indeed reflect an act intended to protect the living against a potential revenant. In order to make sure she would not return, she had to be decapitated *post-mortem* and, as we shall see below, there is good evidence for exactly this precaution in Slavic ethnographic materials.

Grave 10 from Dębczyno displays another elaborate variant of reopening. Here, a female individual was initially buried in a coffin or a pit lined with wood. According to a reconstructed scenario of events provided by Sikorski, at a certain point after the funeral, a deep oval cut was dug and the woman's remains were removed along with some fragments of wood.[64] In this process, however, only parts of the skeleton were taken; the lower limbs were left behind. The pit was then filled with a liquid substance containing calcium. Afterwards, a large granite stone was placed in the grave and the pit was filled with sand up to half its depth. The final act involved starting a fire (as implied by charred wood remains discovered inside the pit), cremating the previously recovered bones *in situ*, and ultimately covering them with a large pink sandstone.

The third reopened grave from Dębczyno (grave 29) belonged to an adult man who was aged between 25 and 35 when he died.[65] Sometime after the funeral, a cut was dug at the foot end and the man's lower legs were removed. It is possible that in this case the intention was to prevent an alleged revenant from walking, or, alternatively, to acquire bones which could be reused in some special practices or sold, perhaps to be later used as amulets or relics.[66]

Overall, the cemetery at Dębczyno is exceptional as it contains several different variants of reopened graves which display features suggesting a rather violent and possibly negative approach towards the deceased. The acts of reopening were conducted in a clearly premeditated but somewhat disorderly and/or rapid manner, and do not display the care for respectful removal and redeposition of the bones that we saw in cases examined earlier. In my view, this is the *only* site in Poland where an argument for reopening with the intention to maim and/or annihilate the dead can be maintained. Nevertheless, we should always acknowledge that the reasons for this non-normative treatment of the dead may have been manifold or ambivalent, and that some burials which look odd or violent to our eyes might in fact signify something completely different – for example, religious devotion and piety, or special care and affection towards the deceased.[67]

4. GRAVE DISTURBANCES IN POLISH ETHNOGRAPHIC ACCOUNTS

We have now examined various examples of grave reopenings from different areas of early medieval Poland. As we have seen, most of these disturbances were intended to add further individuals to pre-existing graves and the vast majority suggest a considerable degree of care in how the remains of the initially buried individuals were handled and moved. All this implies that they had no negative undertones, but that the people responsible for conducting the reopening operated with respect and affection. Only the exceptional case of the cemetery at Dębczyno demonstrates a different motivation on the part of the reopeners, who probably wanted to maim and/or annihilate individuals suspected of being revenants.

Regrettably, there are no contemporary textual sources concerning the motivations for reopening graves in Polish cemeteries between the tenth and thirteenth centuries.[68] There is nothing about conducting such practices with the intention of adding consecutive burials to pre-existing graves, or about reopening graves to maim alleged revenants. Our interpretations today must therefore rely on a careful study of the archaeological material alone, and on tracing patterns in mortuary behaviour. As will be shown further below, it might also sometimes be helpful to refer to comparative evidence from other early medieval cultural milieus.

Despite the lack of textual sources that might illuminate the underlying meanings of grave disturbances in early medieval Poland, the surviving corpus of ethnographic accounts provides some explanation for why graves were reopened in this part of Europe in the early twentieth century. Most of these sources were collected and published in the works of prominent Polish ethnographers such as Adam Fischer,[69] Henryk Biegeleisen,[70] and Kazimierz Moszyński,[71] who all agree that in the early modern times it was the graves of people who died a bad death that were most often subject to reopening. In his study of funerary practices in Poland, Biegeleisen mentioned instances of reopening graves of suicide victims, turning their bodies prone, decapitating them, and placing their severed heads face down. Sometimes, when suicide victims were believed to cause *post-mortem* threat or terror, their bodies were exhumed and buried in a different location, far away from the village. According to other authors, it seems that the custom of reopening graves and turning the bodies of alleged revenants prone was particularly popular in south-east Poland and in the region of Podkarpacie.[72] In some cases, however, the act of reopening, followed by decapitation of the corpse, did not suffice, and the revenants were still believed to pose a threat to society. To be absolutely sure the dead would not return, their bodies were exhumed once again and their limbs cut off and burned to ashes at the borders of the village.[73] In general, the main reason for reopening graves which emerges from early twentieth-century ethnographic accounts is a fear of revenants.

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[64] Sikorski 2000, pp. 131–132.

[65] Sikorski 2000, p. 130.

[66] On the reuse and symbolic meanings of various body parts in the Slavic world, see Kurasiński 2015b; Wawrzeniuk 2015; Wenska 2015.

[67] See, for example, Arcini 2009; Toplak 2015.

[68] For an extensive discussion of medieval textual sources from other cultural milieus, see Caciola 1996; on reopenings in Pomerania and elsewhere in the Western Slavic area, see Gardeła, Kajkowski, Szczepanik 2015, p. 248.

In light of an earlier analysis of reopened graves from early medieval Poland,[74] and in the context of the additional cases discussed in this chapter, it seems that late ethnographic materials can be used to suggest explanations of only some variants of reopenings, namely those which involved the removal of bones and/or their cremation. The apparently violent nature of these acts (e.g. in the cemetery at Dębczyno) strongly suggests that they were conducted with anti-revenant intentions in mind. However, as my analysis of prone burials from Poland has clearly demonstrated (see Chapter 4), the late ethnographic accounts always have to be approached with caution, since not everything they say about atypical funerary practices can be regarded as mirroring the acts and motivations of people from the more distant past. For example, in all cases of prone burials that have so far been discovered in Poland, it is clear that the dead were interred prone during the initial funeral, and not turned face down after an act of reopening stimulated by the fear of revenants. The same holds for the vast majority of graves with traces of decapitation – the severing of the head seems to have occurred *before* committing the body to the ground and *not* after reopening the grave. Of course, it is not unlikely that in some cases the individuals lying in their graves in a prone position or with their heads decapitated were originally buried somewhere else and exhumed at a later time (as described in ethnographic sources) to be interred in a 'deviant' manner, but this is impossible to verify with the methods that we have today. All this shows that we should be very careful in immediately labelling unusual burial phenomena as reflecting the fear of dangerous dead and in projecting twentieth-century ethnographic accounts directly onto archaeological discoveries from the Early Middle Ages.

5. COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVES

After an overview of the phenomenon of grave disturbance in early medieval Poland, we now can devote some space to setting this material into a wider cross-cultural perspective by looking at examples of reopened graves in Viking Age Scandinavia and Anglo-Saxon England. In recent years, considerable advances have been made in research on grave disturbances in these two cultural milieus and a substantial corpus of archaeological evidence has been assembled. This allows us to try to assess whether, and to what extent, early medieval disturbances from Poland reflect funerary behaviour in other parts of Europe.

Grave disturbance in the Viking world

In Viking Age Scandinavia, grave disturbance was practiced much more frequently than in early medieval Poland, and the motivations for gaining access to graves and their contents were manifold. Although a comprehensive study embracing all the different aspects of these practices in various parts of Scandinavia and the wider Viking world has not been attempted yet, several regional analyses demonstrate with clarity that graves were disturbed for a variety of reasons, including the removal of specific objects and bones, but also with the desire to interact with and perhaps even worship the dead.[75] In some cases, it is also possible to argue that the act of reopening was conducted to annihilate an alleged revenant. In addition to archaeological evidence, the vast corpus of textual sources, including Old Norse sagas and Eddic poetry, provides valuable supplementary information about how reopenings could be performed and what these acts could have meant to the people of the North. It is impossible to present and explore all the different archaeological and written sources in detail here, but a brief summary of their main aspects can nonetheless be attempted.[76]

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[69] Fischer 1921, p. 357.

[70] Biegeleisen 1930, p. 101.

[71] Moszyński 1934.

[72] Baranowski 1981, p. 62. See also Kotowicz 2011 for a useful overview of ethnographic accounts concerning belief in revenants in south-east Poland.

[73] Udziela 1922, pp. 154–155.

[74] Gardeła, Kajkowski, Szczepanik 2015.

One of the most frequently discussed examples of reopened graves is that of Oseberg in Vestfold, Norway. As mentioned already in Chapter 6, the large burial mound contained a ship loaded with lavish furnishings, including numerous magnificently crafted objects of everyday use, but also animal offerings and a range of items with ritual significance (**Fig. 7.12**). On the deck behind the mast was a wooden chamber resembling a tent and containing beds on which two adult females were laid (**Fig. 7.13**). The chamber also included chests and domestic objects, several of which were associated with the practice of spinning and weaving. Archaeological analyses of the mound's furnishings and stratigraphy have shown that the grave was reopened several times in the Viking Age, and that in the course of these acts its contents were violently disturbed – the skeletal remains of the two women were disarticulated and removed; some objects were hacked to pieces while others were misplaced or scattered around.[77] Over the years since the grave's discovery, different interpretations for the subsequent disturbances of the Oseberg mound have been proposed. The lack of jewellery in the grave suggests that it may have been removed during break-ins aimed at acquiring portable wealth, but as Jan Bill and Aoife Daly observe, this does not seem to have been the primary objective.[78]

Although the Oseberg grave was excavated in the early years of the twentieth century (1903–1904), its documentation is remarkably meticulous even by today's standards. In addition to the excellent preservation of organic remains, the grave and its contents are ideally suited for various detailed studies involving new and cutting-edge technologies.[79] Apart from aDNA and forensic analyses, the latest study of Oseberg by Bill and Daly has focused on re-interpreting the meaning behind the acts of reopening. Because the 'robbers' left their wooden spades in the trenches leading into the grave, through dendrochronological dating it was possible to estimate when the acts of disturbance probably occurred – it seems that the break-in took place after AD 953 but before AD 990.[80] In light of this, the study argues that the disturbances of the grave may have been an example of 'power politics', expressing an attempt to legitimize claims to power, perhaps by the Danish king Harald 'Bluetooth' Gormsson, who in the tenth century tried to take control over the Vestfold region.[81] Bill and Daly also point out the great effort and time that was needed to reopen the grave:

> Hundreds of cubic metres of soil were removed with wooden spades and stretchers, work which must have lasted several days. Such undertakings would be impossible to carry out in secret, and either they were done in agreement with the population in the area, or under the protection of someone powerful enough to counter any local resistance so that a temporary legal space was established.[82]

Analyses such as the ones discussed above and the new details they provide are startling, but due to matters of preservation, they can only be conducted in very exceptional cases. Although many other graves were disturbed in the Viking Age, we can hardly ever pin-down with any precision the moment in time when the acts of reopening occurred. Apart from Oseberg, intentional disturbances have also been discovered in other places in Vestfold, such as in the cemeteries at Borre,[83] Gulli[84] and at Gokstad, which contains another famous ship grave from the Viking Age.[85] Further reopenings have also been recorded at Grønhaug on

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[75] See, for example, Gjerpe 2005; 2007; Erna Þórarinsdóttir 2008; Bill, Daly 2012; Gardeła 2016b; Klevnäs 2016.

[76] For more detailed studies into the motif of grave disturbance and interactions with the dead in Old Norse literature, see Gardeła 2013d; 2016b; Hofmann 2015.

[77] For a discussion of these acts of reopening, see Nordeide 2011; Bill, Daly 2012. See also Arwill-Nordbladh 2002 on the modern reopenings of the Oseberg mound as well as their wider social context and reception.

[78] Bill, Daly 2012, p. 815.

[79] Bill 2008.

[80] Bill, Daly 2012, p. 813.

[81] Bill, Daly 2012, p. 820.

[82] Bill, Daly 2012, p. 818.

[83] Myhre, Gansum 2003.

[84] Gjerpe 2005; 2007.

[85] Nicolaysen 1882.

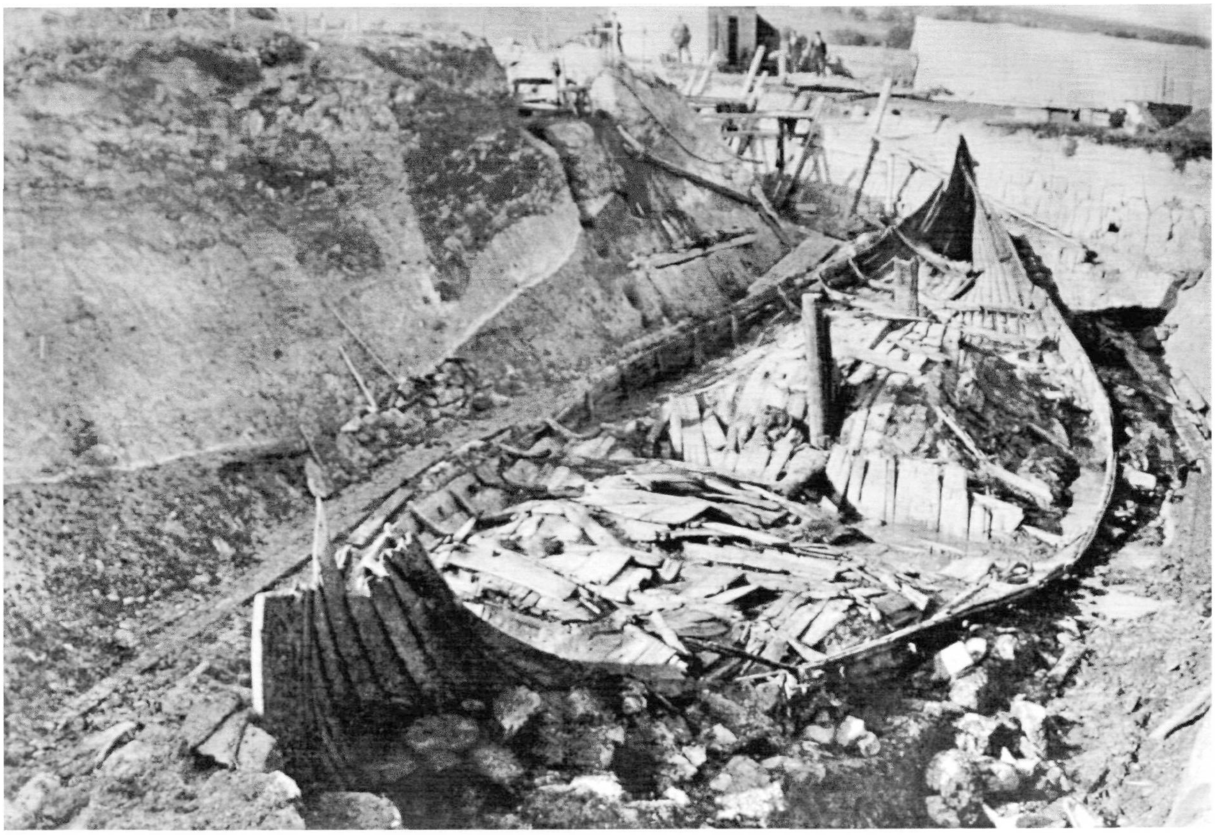

Fig. 7.12. The Oseberg ship during excavation. After Brøgger 1917, p. 76.

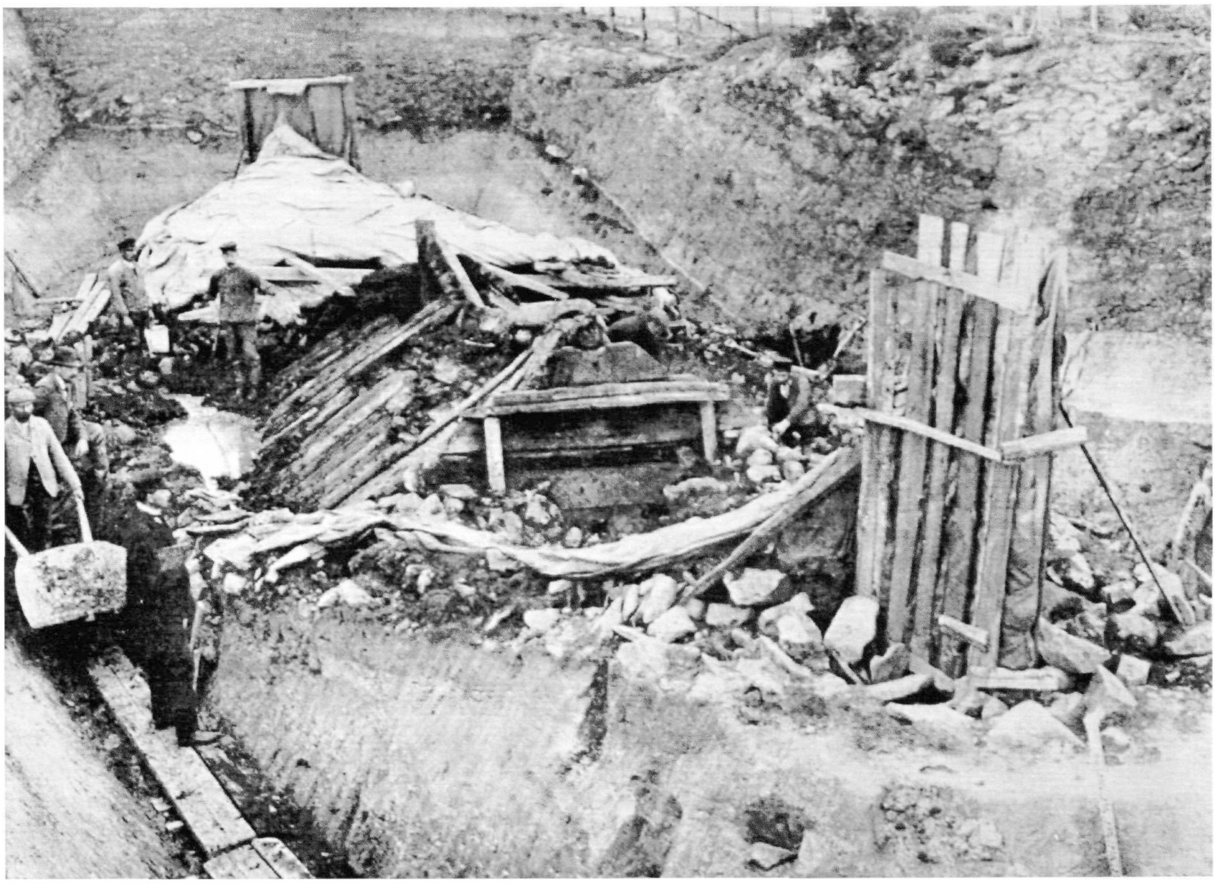

Fig. 7.13. The exposed deck of the Oseberg ship and the disturbed burial chamber. After Brøgger 1917, p. 33.

Karmøy[86] and at Tune.[87] The remarkable ship grave at Ladby in Funen, Denmark[88] was also reopened in the past. A recent study has shown that a range of graves in Iceland[89] were affected by intentional disturbances, although they are usually not as lavishly furnished as those in Scandinavia.

Based on the archaeological evidence gathered so far, it seems that it was often the opulent graves that were reopened, and that this act usually involved the removal of various grave goods. Although we tend to see the taking of grave goods as having negative connotations and classify it as 'robbery', we should be open to other interpretational possibilities and acknowledge the nuances that this practice may have entailed. In trying to add sophistication to current understandings of grave disturbances in the Viking world, Anne Hofmann has recently observed:

> (...) it is indeed possible that what we call "grave robbery" might actually have been part of a burial tradition, meaning that certain grave goods which were deposited with the deceased for the burial ceremony were later retrieved by the same people who buried them in the first place. It could have been a symbolic act which allowed the deceased to bring the objects to the otherworld without losing them for this world. The boundary between grave robbery and the retrieval of grave goods is thin and should not be forgotten.[90]

Alison Klevnäs, who has recently devoted a stimulating article to the problem of grave disturbance in the Viking world, develops these ideas even further and argues that the goods buried with the dead were believed to be 'imbued with the essence of the owner'. As she writes:

> The celebrated reopening episodes seen in the Norwegian ship mounds and elsewhere were not exceptional, calamitous fates for Viking-age burials. Rather, they were a key way in which graves could be reworked to make use of the stories of memory and value they contained. As for the artefacts taken from the burials, removal from the burial context was similarly not an unforeseen possibility, but rather an accepted part of their role as intergenerational artefacts.[91]

The *Íslendingasögur* and *fornaldarsögur* are particularly rich in descriptions of grave disturbances. Based on their narratives it is possible to isolate several different motivations for these practices. In line with the arguments of Klevnäs and other scholars, the textual accounts show that the predominant reason to reopen a grave was to obtain valuable objects that had been buried with the dead, usually in the form of weapons,[92] which were often believed to possess special powers or to be items of inheritance.

However, another strong motivation to reopen a grave was to annihilate a revenant that posed threat to the society. In Chapter 5 I have discussed such an encounter recorded in *Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar*, where the hero Grettir decapitated a mound-dweller called Kárr. Several other examples of this practice are preserved in the extant texts.[93]

As Anne Hofmann notes, the third reason for breaking into graves may have been to seek shelter. This is best portrayed in *Orkneyinga saga*, which describes how, during a winter in Orkney, Jarl Haraldr and his men enter an ancient grave mound to hide from adverse weather conditions.[94]

It is worth adding that the custom of reopening graves did not cease with the pagan times but was occasionally practiced also after the conversion – from the late tenth century onwards, certain graves of prominent individuals were reopened in different parts of Scandinavia and Iceland with the intention of moving their bodies from pagan cemeteries to different places of burial (usually a church). In the process, the dead were sometimes subjected to *post-mortem* baptism.[95]

Let us now take a closer look at the people responsible for the acts of reopening and examine the various technicalities that these practices involved. Based on extant written accounts we can assume that both relatives of the deceased and people unrelated to them by ties of blood could have had access to the grave. Almost all of these people would have been men, although there is also one remarkable account of a female named Hervǫr who reopens a grave of her deceased father with the desire of gaining possession of his sword (*Hervarar saga ok Heidreks*).[96] Hervǫr is a very interesting and complex character; she is a warrior woman who displays masculine characteristics.[97] It is worth noting in this context that when she attempts to reopen the grave, she actually uses a male name, Hervarðr, and wears male clothing.[98] This gives us an important hint that in the Norse world, the practice of reopening graves was more typical of men than women.

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[86] Bonde, Stylegar 2009.

[87] Shetelig 1917.

[88] Sørensen 2001.

[89] Erna Þórarinsdóttir 2008.

[90] Hofmann 2015, p. 309.

[91] Klevnäs 2016, p. 470.

[92] E.g. Hofmann 2015, pp. 296–300.

[93] For more examples, see Gardeła 2013c; Hofmann 2015, pp. 300–305.

[94] Hofmann 2015, pp. 305–306.

[95] Hofmann 2015, pp. 306–309.

[96] Turville-Petre 1976; Hofmann 2015, pp. 296–297.

The saga accounts make it very clear that the process of accessing a burial mound was a time consuming and demanding task. *Hrómundar saga*, for example, mentions that it took six days for a group of men to reopen a grave, and *Harðar saga* speaks of five days.[99] What is particularly interesting from an archaeological perspective, however, is that the texts provide rather precise details about how the acts of reopening graves were conducted. The various particulars are so carefully portrayed that the memory of these practices must have been very strong in the North and must have survived long after the Viking Age. Because the sagas provide details about the external and internal structures of reopened graves (e.g. mounds, wooden roofs and posts), it is possible to classify many of them as chamber graves.[100] The dead inhabitants of these graves are often portrayed as sitting surrounded by different grave goods and sometimes slaughtered animals. Interestingly, seated burials in chamber graves are well attested in Viking Age archaeology, especially in cemeteries at Birka and in Rus.[101]

One of the most thorough textual accounts of reopening a grave with the intention of obtaining precious goods, but also to annihilate a revenant, is preserved in *Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar*. I have already mentioned it in Chapter 5 where I discussed the fight that ensued between the grave's inhabitant and the hero of the saga. Here, however, we can focus more closely on the very way in which the process of reopening was conducted:

> Nú leið af nóttin; kemr Grettir þar snimma; váru þá til reiðu graftólin; ferr bóndi með honum til haugsins. Grettir braut nú hauginn ok var at mikilvirkr, léttir eigi fyrr en hann kemr at viðum; var þá mjǫk áliðinn dagrinn. Siðan reif hann upp viðuna. Auðunn latti hann þá mjǫk at ganga í hauginn. Grettir bað hann geyma festar, – "en ek mun fornvitnask, hvat hér býr fyrir." Gekk Grettir þá í hauginn; var þar myrkt ok þeygi þefgott. Leitask hann nú fyrir, hversu háttat var. Hann fann hestbein, ok siðan drap hann sér við stólbrúðir ok fann, at þar sat maðr á stóli. Þar var fé mikit í gulli ok silfri borit saman ok einn kistill settr undir fœtr honum, fullr af silfri. Grettir tók þetta fé allt ok bar til festar; ok er hann gekk útar eptir hauginum, var gripit til hans fast. Lét hann þá laust féit, en rézk í mót þeim, ok tókusk þeir þá til heldr óþyrmiliga.[102]

> The night passed, and Grettir came back early in the morning. The tools were ready for him, and the farmer accompanied him to the mound. Grettir broke open the mound and worked furiously, not stopping until he had reached the timber props, by which time it was very late in the day. Then he tore away the props. Audun discouraged him as best as he could from entering the mound. Grettir told him to watch over the rope, "because I want to find out what's inside there." Then Grettir went inside the mound. It was dark and smelled unpleasant. He explored the mound to see how it was laid out. He found some horse bones, then he rubbed against the carved back of a chair and could tell there was a man sitting in it. A huge amount of gold and silver had been piled up there and the man's feet were resting on a chest full of silver. Grettir took all the treasure and carried it over to the rope. And when he was walking back inside the mound, something grabbed him tight. He dropped the treasure and fought back, and the two of them grappled violently, knocking everything over that was in their way.[103]

The procedure of reopening the mound described in the saga parallels the evidence that we have from archaeology. In the case of Oseberg, which was mentioned above, the roof of the chamber was also destroyed and the 'robbers' accessed the grave from above (**Fig. 7.14**). This shows that the descriptions of mortuary acts included in the sagas sometimes mirror actual practices conducted in the Viking Age, and that they are much more than literary creations of their medieval authors. The sagas also show that there may have been a wide range of motivations for reopening graves, and that the annihilation of a revenant was just one of them. Moreover, they clearly illustrate that the removal of objects, which archaeologists often tend to consider 'robbery', may have been a sanctioned act,

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[97] On Hervǫr and other warrior women in the Old Norse world, see Gardeła 2013d; 2017; in press c.

[98] On the ambiguous gender characteristics of Hervǫr, see Mayburd 2014.

[99] See Gardeła 2013d, pp. 380–382; Hofmann 2015, pp. 299–300 for further details and discussion.

[100] See Gardeła 2013a for a detailed analysis of the parallels between archaeological discoveries and textual descriptions of reopenings.

[101] For a detailed discussion of different variants of chamber graves in Central and Eastern Europe, see Janowski 2015.

[102] *Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar* (ch. 18); Text after Guðni Jónsson 1936, pp. 57–58.

[103] *Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar* (18); Translation after Scudder 1997, p. 75.

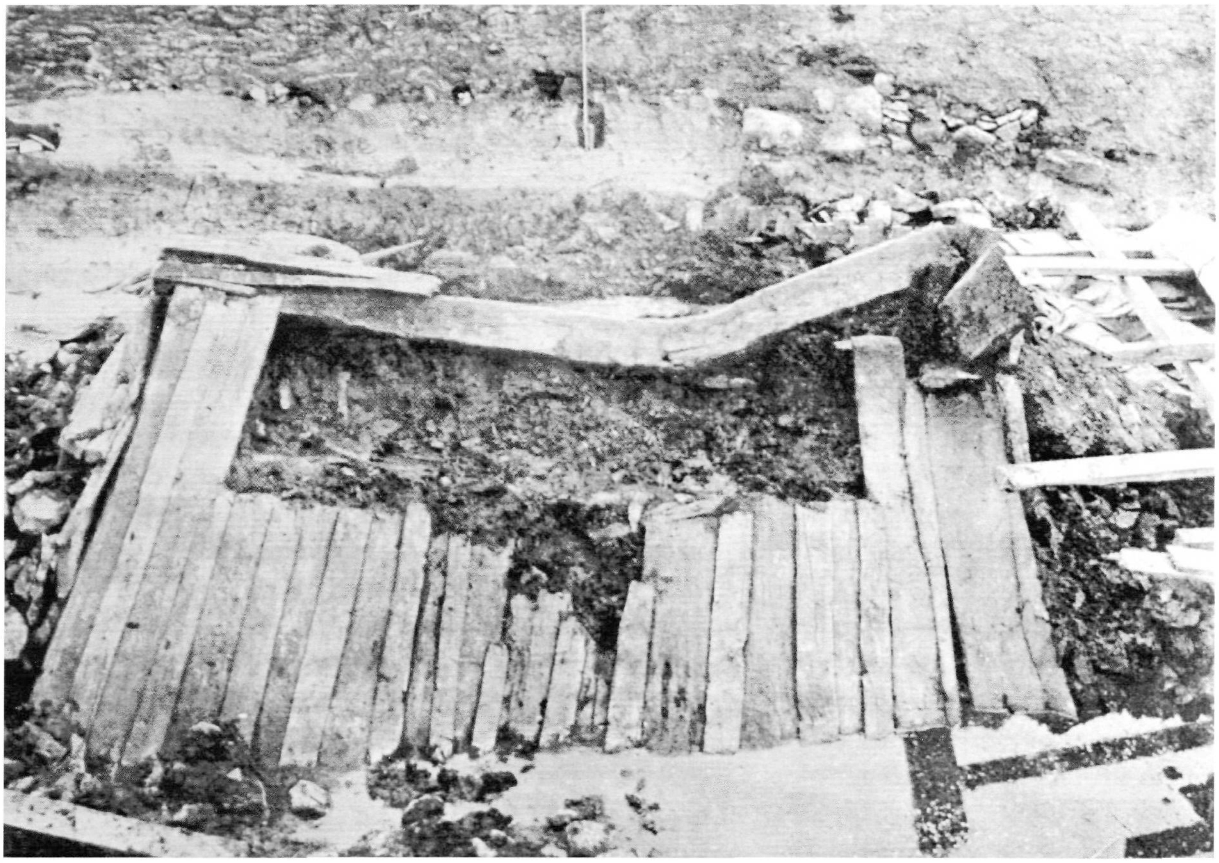

Fig. 7.14. Damage to the roof of the burial chamber at Oseberg. After Brøgger 1917, p. 32

perhaps even part of a prolonged funerary ceremony. All this material, when set into a wider context, shows that it is necessary to approach archaeological examples of grave disturbance with caution and avoid interpreting them only according to one simplified pattern. This is also a good lesson to remember while attempting to interpret early medieval reopened graves from the Slavic area.

Grave disturbance in Anglo-Saxon England

The seventh century AD in Merovingian Europe, which stretched from Austria to England, saw what some scholars call 'an epidemic of grave disturbance'.[104] During this time, numerous graves were reopened with the intention of removing objects buried with the dead or their body parts. In early studies, such acts were typically regarded as robberies conducted by people to gain portable wealth. Indeed, among the goods removed from graves were weapons, jewellery and other commodities that would have been regarded as holding considerable material value. However, there is much more to the notion of reopening graves than meets the eye. Today, approaches to acts of disturbance in the Merovingian world have become much more sophisticated and are incorporating a wide range of innovative perspectives.[105] Due to growing archaeological evidence and the development of more nuanced methods of recording and analysing grave disturbances, scholars have begun to ask new questions, which have allowed them to better understand the plethora of meanings that these practices may have held.

Over the last several years, research on grave disturbance in Anglo-Saxon England has been reinvigorated, especially by Alison Klevnäs who in a range of studies has looked at this phenomenon in a very comprehensive way. In her book entitled *Whodunnit? Grave Robbery in Anglo-Saxon England and the Merovingian Kingdoms*, she proposes a synthetic approach to the phenomenon of grave disturbance and points out that this practice was much more frequent than earlier assumed. It seems to have been particularly popular in the south-eastern kingdom of Kent, but the motivations for conducting it were manifold and included a desire to obtain valued objects, annihilate revenants, destroy monuments in struggles for power, conduct rituals associated with Christianisation, and much else. Most importantly, the study has shown that the practice of labelling all forms of grave disturbances as 'robberies' should be abandoned, because the term 'robbery' carries negative connotations and immediately imposes a very specific and one-sided interpretation on the archaeological material.

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[104] Klevnäs 2015b, p. 157.

[105] See, for example, Aspöck 2005; 2011; van Haperen 2010; 2013; Noterman 2011; Zintl 2012; Klevnäs 2007; 2013; 2015a; 2015b; Dobos 2014.

In a number of more recent articles, Klevnäs has looked at the practice of grave disturbance from several previously understudied angles. Inspired by anthropological studies of gift economies,[106] she argues that the concept of ownership is key to understanding early medieval grave disturbance.[107] She rightly observes that, when graves were reopened, not all of their contents were removed; rather, those responsible were very conscious and selective about what to take and what to leave behind. As Klevnäs argues:

> (...) differing forms of ownership underlie the removal of only certain types of artefacts from disturbed graves: the taken objects are those for which transferability between owners was possible, but whose key quality was an ability to carry with them values and memories from each possessor, stretching beyond and linking human lifetimes.[108]

An important observation from Klevnäs' study is that, in Anglo-Saxon England, it was usually brooches and swords that were systematically removed, not specific bones.[109] This stands in stark contrast to the materials from the Slavic world which we have surveyed above, where the bones (e.g. skulls) were either removed or displaced and piled up in the grave pits. It is interesting to note that, while brooches and swords were typically taken from Anglo-Saxon graves, other items accompanying the dead – also made of reusable materials – were left behind. The reason for this seems to have been that these items were regarded as being infused with very specific meanings or memories, which perhaps made them more 'special' than anything else the dead were buried with. Moreover, it appears that brooches and swords could have played a significant role in gift exchange and rituals associated with inheritance. This idea is strengthened even further by the fact that the state of preservation of those objects chosen for removal apparently did not matter to the reopeners – they would take them anyway, even if they were in a poor condition.[110]

As regards the technical aspects of the reopening procedure, those responsible seem to have known perfectly well which graves to dig up. As Klevnäs argues, there was a preference for graves from within one generation, so the memory of those interred in them would still have been quite vivid.[111] As in the case of Viking Age Scandinavia, the selected graves were generally larger and had more lavish furnishings, suggesting that the deceased might have been of some importance during their lives.

Based on the evidence that has been studied and assessed so far, it seems that grave disturbances may have been strongly motivated by inter-personal conflicts. As Klevnäs claims, disturbance in neighbouring cemeteries could have resulted from 'local, probably kin-based disputes'.[112]

6. CONCLUSIONS

The conclusion that arises from this comparative study of grave disturbances is that when the evidence for reopening graves in early medieval Poland is analysed systematically and from an interdisciplinary perspective, it appears that the main reason for these practices was not robbery or protection against revenants, as was sometimes the case in Viking Age Scandinavia or Anglo-Saxon England, but rather to add consecutive bodies to pre-existing graves. Given the careful treatment of the bones and their respectful (re)deposition, as well as the lack of traces of intrusive cuts or any other signs of rapid behaviour which would point to robbery or anti-revenant practice, it is plausible to argue that these were socially sanctioned acts, perhaps performed by the relatives or friends of the deceased, who would have known perfectly well where a particular grave was located and who or what it contained. The performance of such consecutive burials was probably dictated by strong bonds between people who happened to pass away at different times and so could not be buried simultaneously.

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[106] E.g. Mauss 2001[1925].

[107] Klevnäs 2015b.

[108] Klevnäs 2015b, p. 158.

[109] Klevnäs 2015b, p. 162.

[110] Klevnäs 2015b, p. 165.

[111] Klevnäs 2015b, p. 166.

[112] Klevnäs 2015b, p. 168.

We can speculate that the individuals buried at Brzeg, Dziekanowice, Komorowo, Wolin Młynówka, Złota Pińczowska, and in other Polish cemeteries, were lovers, married couples, close friends or family members. However, given the current state of research and the lack of specialist analyses of the osteological material (for example, aDNA analyses), the identities and mutual relations between these people still remain shrouded in mystery. It is hoped that this study will spur and inspire scholars to pay more attention to future discoveries of reopened graves and to employ diverse methods of scientific inquiry in studying them.

CHAPTER 8
CONCLUSIONS

By surveying the history of early medieval funerary archaeology in Poland and examining previous research, this monograph has demonstrated that many ideas about atypical burials put forward eagerly by earlier scholars require major revisions. While it is beyond doubt that the Slavic societies which inhabited Central Europe in the period spanning the tenth and thirteenth centuries were deeply superstitious, this study has shown that it is unjustified to interpret every single example of funerary 'deviance' as an expression of the fear of revenants or vampires, as previous research has often done. By adopting an interdisciplinary methodology and examining the archaeological materials in a cross-cultural perspective, previous one-sided views on prone burials, stoned burials, decapitations and reopened graves have been substantially revised: it has been shown that all these practices held a much wider range of meanings than previously assumed. This study has also demonstrated explicitly that burial practices which look strange, gruesome or violent to our eyes today may not have been perceived in the same, negative way in the past. The main points to emerge from this research can be summarised as follows:

- The most explicit categories of atypical funerary practices – and those which have been given special attention in the present study – include prone burials, burials of people covered with stones, decapitated burials and different types of grave disturbances.
- Prone burials in early medieval Poland signalled a plethora of meanings and were much more multifaceted than previously assumed. While some of them could potentially be associated with the fear of revenants, it is rather more likely that the majority reflect the implementation of justice and represent a way of dealing with criminals. In light of comparative materials, however, it is possible to argue that some chronologically late examples of prone burials located in close vicinity to places of Christian worship could have belonged to particularly pious people. The act of interring them face down could have implied an act of *post-mortem* penance.
- Decapitated burials in early medieval Poland are very difficult to interpret due to the often problematic and laconic nature of published reports, and because most of them have not been subjected to careful osteological analyses. Nevertheless, as in the case of prone burials, it seems more likely that most represent burials of criminals rather than revenants. Decapitation as a form of punishment is well attested in medieval textual sources, both from the area of Poland and from other cultural milieus. Based on the information preserved in these written accounts, it seems that beheading was regarded as an honourable form of the death penalty.
- The custom of placing stones on the dead in early medieval Poland could have served a wide range of purposes. Although it is usually impossible to determine if people buried with stones on their bodies died during an execution, this idea cannot be ruled out completely. This interpretation makes sense when the stones are small in size and fill the grave pit. Although there are no textual sources from the Western Slavic area which could confirm that stones were used as a form of protection against the rising of revenants, it is likely that the occurrence of very large stones on the dead was indeed intended to hold them down in their graves. Alternatively, these large stones could have served to protect the cadaver from the intrusion of animals or robbers. Stones may also have helped to position and display the bodies of the dead in the desired way during the funeral.
- Records of grave disturbances are relatively rare in early medieval Polish cemeteries. Those that have been observed, however, seem to have been typically conducted with the intention of adding further bodies to pre-existing graves. The act of reopening was not usually motivated by the desire to obtain specific body parts or commodities buried with the dead or to maim or annihilate revenants. A survey of reopened graves

in Polish cemeteries has shown unequivocally that the nineteenth- and twentieth-century ethnographic accounts of dealing with revenants do not find clear parallels in the archaeological material from the early medieval period.

1. THE WIDER SOCIAL AND IDEOLOGICAL CONTEXT OF ATYPICAL BURIALS IN POLAND

Having now conducted a thorough survey of atypical burials in early medieval Poland, an important problem that remains to be solved is whether these practices expressed deeply rooted pre-Christian concepts from times predating the conversion, or whether they reflected genuinely new ideas associated with the dynamic social, political and ideological changes occurring after the acceptance of Christianity. It is not easy to answer this question, mainly because extant textual sources say very little about the Slavic conceptions of death and afterlife, being mostly written by foreign observers or commentators from different cultural and religious backgrounds. Nevertheless, some important hints about the wider context and meaning of atypical burials can be uncovered by analysing their dating and spatial distribution.

The majority of atypical burials from Poland date to the eleventh century, which was a very turbulent period in history and a time of significant ideological transformations. Old beliefs were being replaced, and Christianity was spreading on an unprecedented scale. Outside of the major centres of power, however, the process of conversion was slow and initially very superficial, affecting mostly the highest strata of society and having a relatively weak impact upon common people, who still took several hundred years to adapt to the new ideological and religious changes. In light of this, and despite the relatively quick abandonment of the pagan rite of cremation, it is very likely that a substantial proportion of early inhumation funerals across Poland were conducted without the attendance of clergy and orchestrated by people who only had a very rough and limited understanding of Christian religion. By the thirteenth century, this blending of old and new funerary customs is shown by a lack of orthodoxy in burial customs, including a remarkable diversity in body alignment and furnishings, as well as in the internal and external construction of graves from this period.

All this gives rise to the hypothesis that *some* atypical burials from rural cemeteries and areas outside the direct control of ruling elites could indeed represent a popular fear that the dead might rise from their graves. According to some scholars, this fear may have been triggered by the fact that, in contrast to the pre-Christian period, it was now deemed inappropriate to cremate the dead. It has been argued that people who performed evil deeds during their lives, and/or who died what may be regarded as bad death, may have been feared of returning in the form of revenants. The perception of this threat to society would have been strengthened by the new custom requiring bodies to be laid in the ground intact. This may have led people to seek a compromise in the performance of funerals by combining a 'Christian' rite of inhumation with 'pagan' rituals intended to hold the dead in their graves. While this interpretation may perhaps be correct in some isolated instances, it does not seem likely for atypical burials located in close vicinity to important centres of power.

An alternative reading of the wider social and ideological meaning of atypical burials from Poland emerges when they are considered in a cross-cultural perspective. In Anglo-Saxon England, for example, atypical burials were performed both before and after the conversion, but in the Christian period, from the sixth century onwards, they became more frequent as part of a formalised judicial practice. As Andrew Reynolds argues, this was associated with the process of state formation and reputation building by the earliest English kings:

> (...) the rise of formal judicial behaviour can now be seen as a reflection of the ability of ruling families to put into place instruments of early governance expressing power beyond that of the ability to wage war, accumulate wealth, and construct imposing residences. Much is made of the more overtly violent aspects of state-formation and reputation-building by the earliest English kings, but they themselves can only have achieved dominance over significant groups of warriors and their kin groups through an ability to mediate and legislate.[1]

The power of the emerging Anglo-Saxon ruling elite was therefore reinforced by 'the administration of justice, the erection of gallows, and the incorporation of existing markers of outcast status with regard to modes of burial'.[2]

In light of this, it is possible that similar ideological motivations might have been shared by the ruling elites of the Piast dynasty. The period after the conversion between the eleventh and thirteenth centuries was marked by an increase in new forms of manifesting power.[3] This is particularly seen in the commissioning of impressive strongholds and the building of elite residences and churches (**Fig. 8.1**, **Fig. 8.2**, **Fig. 8.3** and **Fig. 8.4**), but also in the introduction of monetary economies and the emergence of new towns, markets and trade networks facilitating the intercultural transfer of exotic and luxurious goods.[4] In addition to the construction of impressive architecture and the exchange and display of portable wealth, another important way of showing prestige and power in the Early Middle Ages was the orchestration of burials, especially those involving visually spectacular forms and furnishings – such as chamber graves, for example.[5]

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[1] Reynolds 2009, p. 236.

[2] Reynolds 2009, p. 236.

As part of the complex, dynamic and multifaceted process of ideological and religious conversion that affected practically all spheres of life and death for early medieval Slavs in Poland, it was necessary to develop and refine the system of justice.[6] The growth of towns and the development of the Piast state, coupled with the intensification of trade and the introduction of coinage, certainly created greater opportunities for theft and other crimes. As Andrew Reynolds has rightly observed with regard to a similar transformation in Anglo-Saxon England, 'it is easier to steal a purse of silver coins and conceal or dispose of them quickly than it is to rustle cattle'.[7] Indeed, the increasing portable wealth of Poland's inhabitants probably spurred wrongdoers to conduct more crimes.

Although public execution sites did not appear in Poland until the late fourteenth century, the significant number of atypical burials in the cemeteries of Greater Poland (e.g. Poznań-Śródka, Dziekanowice, Giecz) and in other regions subjected to the strong rule of the Piasts (e.g. Kałdus, Sandomierz), as well as in close vicinity to important places of intercultural trade and exchange (e.g. Wolin Młynówka), suggests that the development of new judicial systems had already started to take place in the eleventh century during the rule of Bolesław the Brave and his immediate successors. It was just a matter of time until specifically designated sites appeared for the execution and burial of convicts.[8] Until then, the legal status of emerging towns was strengthened by the occasional executions of evildoers, and visually dramatic burials were conducted to demonstrate what awaited those who contravened social norms.[9] Interestingly, the archaeological evidence surveyed in this study shows that, in the early days of Christianity in Poland, social deviants could be buried in consecrated ground, but that in the course of time specially designated places, often of a liminal character, were established for the execution and interment of wrongdoers.[10]

Bearing in mind all of the above, the phenomenon of atypical burials should not be seen only as reflecting a fear of revenants, but should be understood in light of the profound ideological changes accompanying the consolidation of state organization and the ongoing process of religious conversion.

2. POSTSCRIPT

In addition to the different categories of atypical burials from early medieval Poland discussed in the previous chapters of this study, there are a number of other graves that display unusual characteristics. These include, for example, grave 133(272) from Wolin-Młynówka, where an adult individual was found in a position implying that his body had been bound or placed in a bag, perhaps while he was still alive (**Fig. 8.5**).[11] There are also several examples of early medieval graves where the dead were buried with sickles, which may have had various meanings.[12] In addition, a number of sites have

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[3] See, for example, Kurnatowska 2000; 2008; Kara, Krysztofiak, Wyrwa 2016.

[4] See, for example, Kurnatowska, Jurek 2005; Stempin 2013; Krysztofiak 2016.

[5] Janowski 2015; Błaszczyk, Stępniewska 2016.

[6] Grajewski 1956.

[7] Reynolds 2009, p. 245.

[8] E.g. Grajewski 1956; Maisel 1982; Grabarczyk 2008; Wojtucki 2009; Duma 2010; 2015.

[9] As Reynolds 2009, p. 242 observes (based on earlier arguments of Biddle 1976, p. 100), judicial autonomy was one of the defining features of a town: 'Judicial authority should be seen as a primary aspect of the growth of a town, fundamental to its wider identity as a central place and demonstrating its ability, or at least desire, to control its hinterland'.

[10] Burials of felons in churchyard cemeteries were also performed in Anglo-Saxon England, for example in Norwich, as confirmed by both archaeological and textual evidence – Reynolds 2009, p. 246.

[11] Wojtasik 1968, p. 206.

[12] See Janowski, Kurasiński 2010 for an excellent analysis of the custom of burying the dead with sickles in early medieval Poland. Based on the particular position of sickles in graves (e.g. on the body or by the head) and various ethnographic accounts,

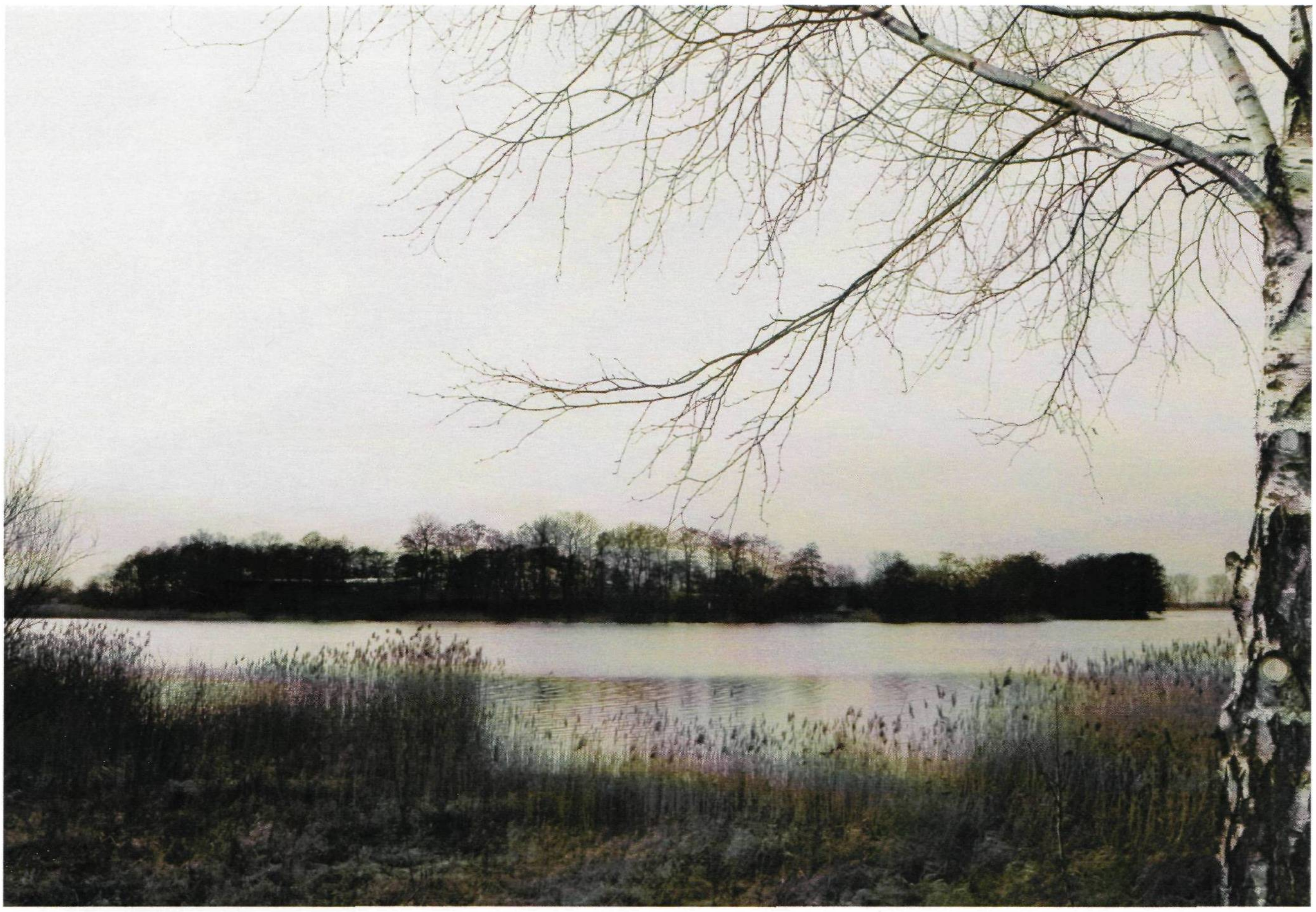

Fig. 8.1. Slavic stronghold at Ostrów Lednicki in Greater Poland. Photo by Leszek Gardeła.

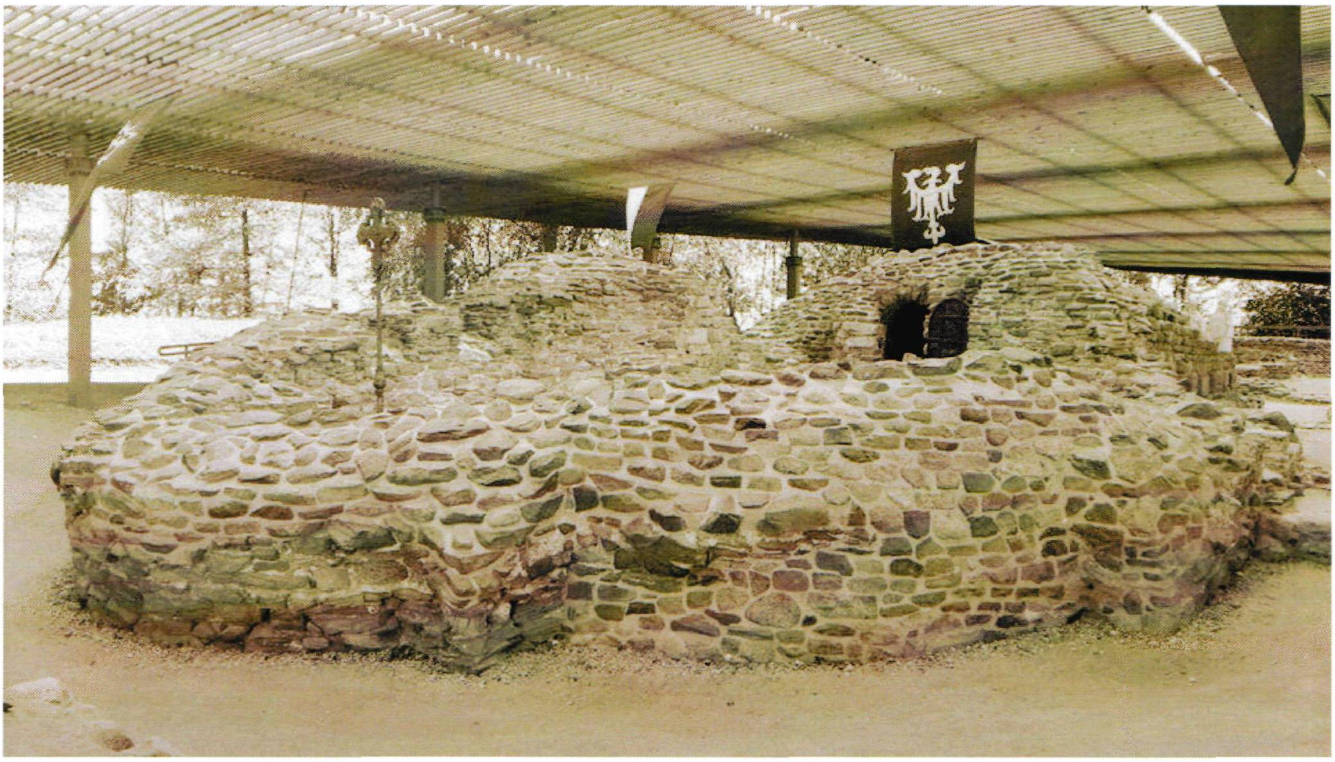

Fig. 8.2. Stone palatium at Ostrów Lednicki in Greater Poland. Photo by Leszek Gardeła.

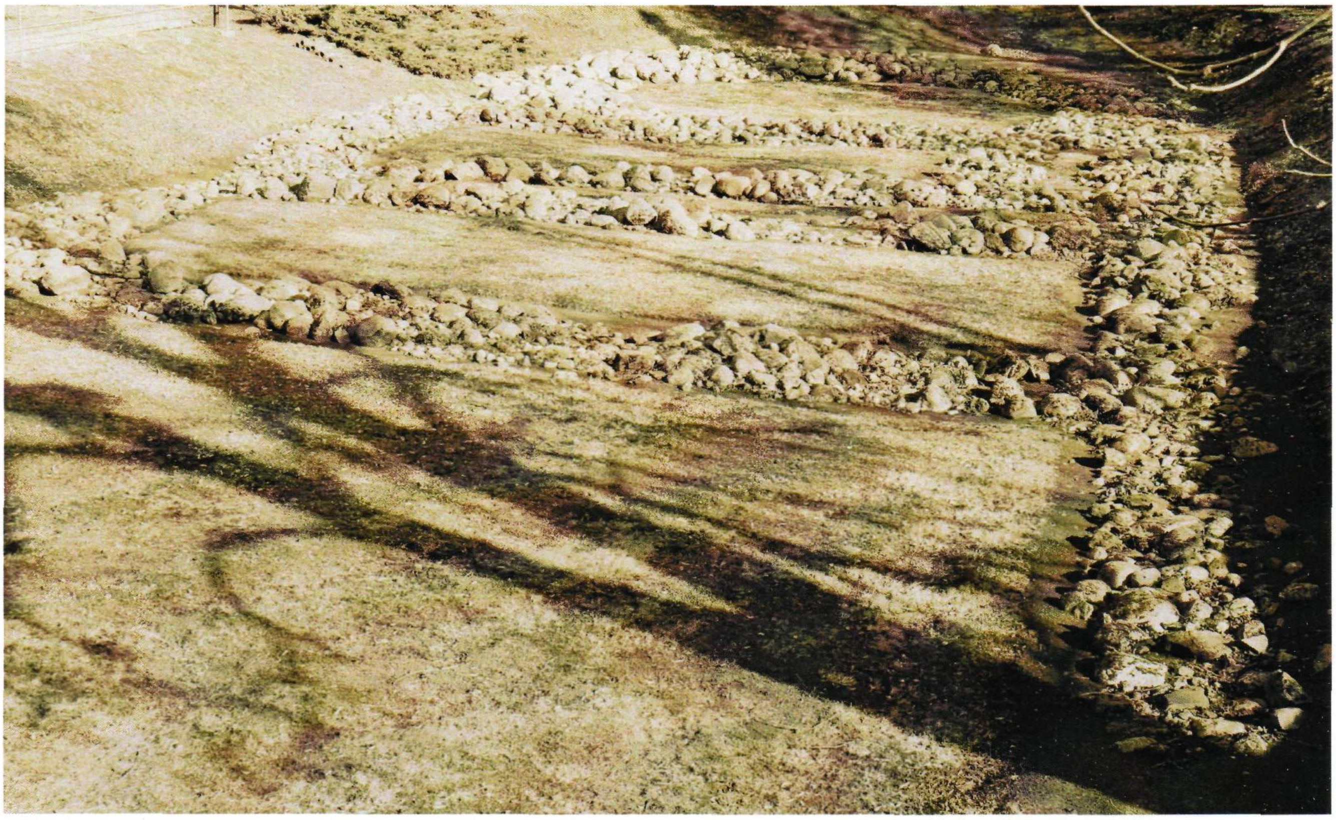

Fig. 8.3. Foundations of a stone residence at Giecz in Greater Poland. Photo by Leszek Gardeła.

Fig. 8.4. The Gniezno cathedral. Photo by Leszek Gardeła.

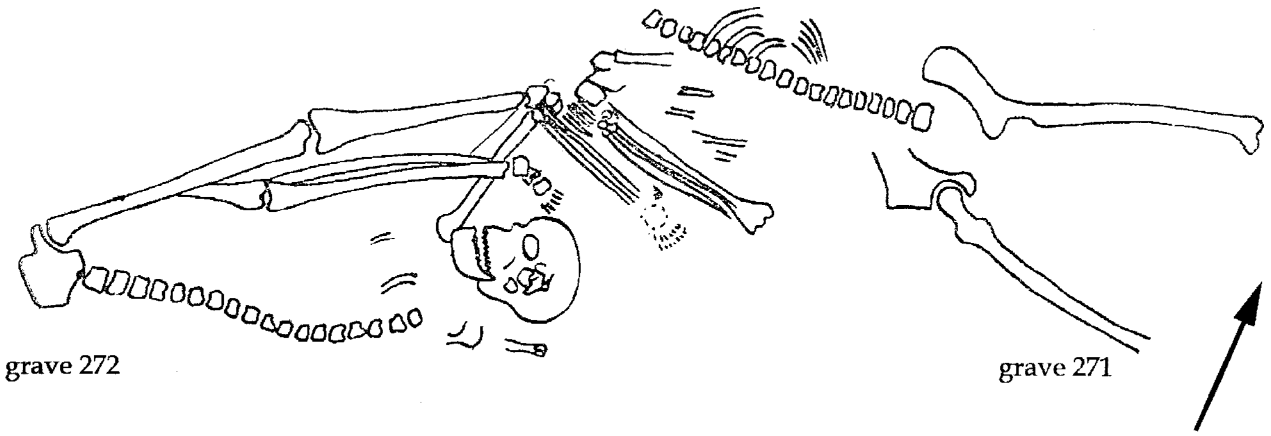

Fig. 8.5. Plan of grave 133(272) from Wolin Młynówka. Reproduced after Wojtasik 1968, p. 77.

been found where people seem to have been buried with coins in their mouths, a custom sometimes regarded as having an apotropaic purpose.[13] Such cases of atypical funerary behaviour continue to puzzle us today and often give rise to sensationalist interpretations. Their uncanny nature tends to evoke ideas about revenants and gruesome funerary acts from 'dark' and 'violent' times. As thrilling as they may be for some audiences, these interpretations must always be taken with a grain of salt and subjected to careful source-critical analysis.

Throughout this study, I have tried to demonstrate that, although early medieval mortuary behaviour in Poland differed considerably from what we are used to seeing today in modern funerals, most of the dead were nevertheless buried in an affectionate way. From the careful treatment and alignment of the bodies, the provision of grave goods, and the effort taken to mark graves on the surface, we can attempt to infer at least some of the emotions that inspired mourners conducting acts of burial. Although we cannot hear their voices or see their facial expressions, their desire to commemorate those who had passed away and send them off in a respectful manner to wherever they were thought to depart is often very clear in the archaeological record. In contrast, so-called atypical burials are usually regarded as reflecting the opposite kind of intention – they are often seen as hasty, careless and violent burials for suspicious individuals who aroused contempt or fear, and who, instead of being remembered, were intended to be forgotten and wiped clean from the pages of history. While in some cases this may indeed have been the intention of those who interred them, I have sought to demonstrate in this study that there is an urgent need to adopt a more personalized approach to non-normative funerary phenomena, and to consider each case in an individualised way.

Every grave holds a story, and by opening our eyes to interpretations which do not categorically regard all atypical burials as belonging to revenants, we may come closer to revealing the many intricacies of past funerary behaviour. Through a careful and unbiased exploration of atypical burials and by presenting the results of our studies in a nuanced way, we have the capacity to make these individuals more immortal than a vampire bite ever would.

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they argue that it is highly probable that they represent a fear of revenants.

[13] On the use of coins in funerary contexts in Poland see, for example, Suchodolski 2015; Wrzesińska, Wrzesiński 2016.

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STRESZCZENIE

ZŁA ŚMIERĆ WE WCZESNYM ŚREDNIOWIECZU. POCHÓWKI ATYPOWE Z ZIEM POLSKICH W PERSPEKTYWIE PORÓWNAWCZEJ

WPROWADZENIE

Podczas badań archeologicznych niemal każdego roku znajdowane są groby, w których zmarli pochowani zostali w nietypowy sposób: na brzuchu, z twarzą skierowaną ku ziemi, przygnieceni kamieniami albo pozbawieni głów. Szczególne nasilenie tego rodzaju zabiegów przypada na okres średniowiecza, a ich ślady znane są z różnych części Polski. Niezwykły charakter tych pochówków od lat budzi niesłabnące zainteresowanie naukowców, mediów i szerokiej publiki – wciąż padają pytania o tożsamość tych zmarłych oraz o przyczyny, które sprawiły, że potraktowano ich w tak odmienny sposób.

Pierwsze groby atypowe odkryto już na początku XX wieku. Ponieważ wraz z upływem lat ich liczba ciągle wzrastała, coraz śmielej próbowano tłumaczyć ich znaczenie. Polscy badacze, zainspirowani przekazami etnograficznymi oraz literaturą piękną, a nierzadko zapewne pod wpływem własnej wyobraźni, wkrótce zaczęli określać te atypowe zjawiska pogrzebowe mianem „pochówków antywampirycznych". Stosując ów chwytliwy termin sugerowano, że dawne społeczności zamieszkujące ziemie polskie w dobie średniowiecza żyły w ciągłym strachu przed niepożądanym wpływem umarłych, a każdy, kto zmarł „złą śmiercią", mógł zamienić się w wampira oraz powrócić z zaświatów, aby siać postrach wśród żywych. Dziś przekonanie o średniowiecznych wampirach wyjątkowo mocno zakorzeniło się w świadomości badaczy i wywiera istotny, choć jednowymiarowy, wpływ na postrzeganie nietypowych pochówków przez polskie oraz zagraniczne media, nierzadko szukające taniej sensacji. Czy jednak rzeczywiście każdy grób atypowy to grób wampira? Niniejsza książka jest próbą zmierzenia się z tym problemem.

Rozdział 1: Słowiański umysł. Zła śmierć i pochówki atypowe w archeologii wczesnego średniowiecza

Pierwsze przekazy dotyczące wiary w żywe trupy wśród Słowian na ziemiach polskich pochodzą z siedemnastego wieku. Jeden z najwcześniejszych został zarejestrowany w 1693 roku we francuskim czasopiśmie *Mercure Galant*. Jego autor zwracał uwagę, że owe żywe trupy – określane mianem „upiorów" – miały tendencję do opuszczania swoich grobów i nachodzenia krewnych lub innych osób, często w celu wysysania z nich krwi i pozbawiania ich życia. Mowa jest tam także o przekonaniu, że upiór będzie tak długo kontynuował swoją działalność, dopóki nie zostanie odcięta jego głowa lub wyrwane serce.

O podobnych obawach przed upiorami wśród słowiańskiego ludu pisał też francuski benedyktyn Dom Augustin Calmet, autor słynnej pracy poświęconej wampiryzmowi zatytułowanej *Dissertations sur les apparitions des anges, des démons et des esprits, et sur les revenants et vampires de Hongrie, de Bohême, de Moravie et de Silésie.* W dziele tym wyrażał on swoje obawy na temat rozmaitych, niepokojących zjawisk, które wydarzyć się miały na terenie osiemnastowiecznej Europy Środkowej. Pisał on o umarłych, którzy rzekomo opuszczali swoje groby, chodzili, mówili i nawiedzali wioski oraz domostwa, raniąc zarówno ludzi jak i zwierzęta, a także pijąc ich krew. Owo wysysanie krwi miało prowadzić do rozmaitych chorób, ale mogło również stawać się przyczyną śmierci. Jak pisał Calmet, jednym ze sposobów, aby temu wszystkiemu zapobiec było odcięcie owym upiorom/wampirom głów, wyrwanie serca, lub spalenie ich zwłok.

Dom Augustin Calmet jest słusznie uważany za jednego z pionierów studiów nad wampiryzmem i jego spostrzeżenia miały istotny wpływ na późniejsze postrzeganie nietypowych zjawisk związanych ze śmiercią. Co jednak znamienne, choć prace Calmeta aspirowały do bycia studiami naukowymi, można czasem odnieść wrażenie, że ich autor wierzył, że wampiry istniały naprawdę.

Dzieła siedemnasto- i osiemnastowiecznych autorów niewątpliwie potwierdzają, że wśród Słowian zamieszkujących w tym czasie obszar ziem polskich istniała wiara w żywe trupy (określane zamiennie jako upiory czy wampiry), które rzekomo zdolne były do wychodzenia z grobów, czynienia rozmaitych szkód, a przy tym siania strachu i terroru wśród żywych. Rodzi się jednak pytanie, na ile uzasadnione jest przenoszenie tych przekonań na czasy znacznie wcześniejsze oraz sięgające okresu średniowiecza? Czy wykorzystywanie tych chronologicznie późnych źródeł do opisywania zjawisk starszych o ponad 600 lat jest uzasadnione? Czy tak zwane pochówki atypowe odkrywane na cmentarzyskach wczesno- i późnośredniowiecznych rzeczywiście są tak unikatowe jak wcześniej sądzono i czy strach przed umarłymi był jedyną przyczyną dokonywania nietypowych zabiegów funeralnych?

W tym rozdziale, prócz postawienia wymienionych wyżej podstawowych pytań badawczych, nakreślone zostało historyczne, społeczne i ideologiczne tło do dalszych rozważań nad zjawiskiem atypowych praktyk pogrzebowych na ziemiach polskich w okresie od X do XIII wieku. Ponieważ niniejsza książka skierowana jest także do czytelników zagranicznych, zawarto tutaj podstawowe informacje na temat geografii Polski oraz ludności słowiańskiej, która zamieszkiwała te tereny we wczesnym średniowieczu. Ponadto pokrótce zarysowana została sytuacja społeczno-polityczna u schyłku X wieku, a także przełomowy proces chrystianizacji, który podjęty został za rządów Mieszka I. Wyraźnie podkreślono, że religijna konwersja przyczyniła się do rozmaitych transformacji, które wpłynęły na różne sfery życia i śmierci mieszkańców wczesnośredniowiecznej Polski, zarówno w makro jak i mikroskali. Wprowadzenie nowej religii było oczywiście procesem długotrwałym, a oddziaływanie nowej ideologii na mieszkańców piastowskiej domeny przybierało różne oblicza w zależności od regionu i jednostki. Dawne, przedchrześcijańskie wierzenia nie zostały momentalnie wyparte.

W cieniu słowiańskich bogów

Aby lepiej zrozumieć złożony charakter religijnych i ideologicznych transformacji, które miały miejsce we wczesnym średniowieczu na ziemiach polskich, istotne jest bliższe przyjrzenie się wierzeniom Słowian zarówno przed jak i po przyjęciu chrześcijaństwa. Niestety poznanie pogańskich przekonań religijnych tej ludności jest znacznie utrudnione ze względu na charakter zachowanych źródeł – zdecydowana większość przekazów pisanych dotyczących dawnych bogów, istot nadnaturalnych i praktyk rytualnych, które podejmowane były przez Słowian przed chrystianizacją, wyszła bowiem spod pióra zewnętrznych obserwatorów: najczęściej obcych misjonarzy czy podróżników. Ponadto wiele z tych źródeł ma stosunkowo późną chronologię i nie zawsze informacje, które są w nich ujęte, pochodzą z pierwszej ręki. W związku z tym niezwykle trudno jest ocenić na ile odzwierciedlają one ówczesną rzeczywistość, a na ile są one zmodyfikowane (lub nawet zmyślone) przez ich autorów, działających pod wpływem zupełnie odmiennej ideologii i zwykle na zlecenie obcych władców.

Jeżeli jednak do źródeł dotyczących słowiańskiego pogaństwa podejdziemy w sposób całościowy oraz interdyscyplinarny, to wówczas okaże się, że ludność ta wierzyła w różne istoty nadnaturalne, które zamieszkiwały otaczający ich świat, a także posiadała rozbudowany panteon bogów i prawdopodobnie także bogiń. Na podstawie zachowanych źródeł można przypuszczać, że jednym z najważniejszych bogów Słowian był Świętowit (Sventovit), którego świątynię w Arkonie na Rugii opisał duński kronikarz Saxo Grammaticus w dziele znanym jako *Gesta Danorum*. Jego wschodniosłowiańskim odpowiednikiem był najprawdopodobniej Perun, uznawany za boga o kompetencjach związanych z wojną. Przeciwieństwem Świętowita w wierzeniach Słowian Zachodnich był Trzygłów (Triglav) – bóg o trzech obliczach, którego świątynia znajdowała się w Szczecinie. Jego wschodniosłowiańskim odpowiednikiem był Weles. Bóg ten uznawany jest za pana magii, zaświatów i podziemi. Przekazy ludowe zachowały w szczątkowej formie opowieść na temat toczącego się konfliktu między wspomnianymi wyżej bogami, związanego też z aktem kreacji świata. Niewykluczone, że ikonograficzne nawiązania do słowiańskiego dualizmu i do tych dwóch boskich oponentów (Świętowita/Peruna oraz Trzygłowa/Welesa) ukazane zostały na niektórych wczesnośredniowiecznych zabytkach archeologicznych, które omówione zostały bliżej w Rozdziale 2.

Po zarysowaniu słowiańskich wyobrażeń o świecie nadnaturalnym oraz o zamieszkujących go istotach i bogach, nieco uwagi poświęcono także różnym metodom, które stosowane są w badaniach nad przedchrześcijańskimi wierzeniami dawnych Słowian. Szczególną uwagę skupiono tu na tak zwanej metodzie retrospektywnej (ang. *retrospective method*), która zakłada wykorzystanie chronologicznie późnych źródeł do studiów nad zjawiskami znacznie wcześniejszymi. Badania retrospektywne - obecnie prężnie rozwijające się w Skandynawii, Finlandii i Estonii - mają w Polsce wyjątkowo długą historię. Opierając się na ich założeniach, naukowcy często próbowali interpretować wierzenia pogańskich Słowian posługując się dziewiętnastowiecznymi przekazami etnograficznymi. Patrząc z dzisiejszej perspektywy, należy przyznać, że nie zawsze tego typu podejścia były stosowne i czasem zbyt swobodnie łączono ze sobą zjawiska nie tylko odległe od siebie w czasie, ale także pod względem geograficznym i kulturowym. W nauce polskiej bezkrytyczne stosowanie metody retrospektywnej miało też wpływ na postrzeganie wczesnośredniowiecznych pochówków atypowych, które chętnie interpretowane były w kontekście dziewiętnastowiecznych przekazów o upiorach, wampirach, strzygach czy innych rodzajach żywych trupów, które rzekomo nawiedzać miały społeczności wiejskie w tej części Europy. Należy jednak z całą mocą podkreślić, że żadne średniowieczne źródła pisane dotyczące terenów Słowiańszczyzny Zachodniej (lub konkretniej ziem polskich) nie wspominają o istnieniu tam wiary w wampiry. Nie musi to jednak oznaczać, że ludność ta nie znała koncepcji żywego trupa. Wręcz przeciwnie, wiele przemawia za tym że Słowianie wierzyli w to, że niektórzy zmarli mogą powstać ze swoich grobów - podobne przekonania podzielały wszak inne współczesne im ludy wczesnego średniowiecza, na przykład Skandynawowie czy Anglosasi. Co jednak znamienne, w przypadku Słowian Zachodnich zamieszkujących ziemie polskie, nie wiemy jakim terminem (lub terminami) posługiwano się by nazywać takie istoty. Jakkolwiek współcześni badacze chętnie mówią o „wampiryzmie" wśród średniowiecznych Słowian, to należy zdać sobie sprawę, że określenie „wampir" pojawiło się na tych terenach dopiero w XVII lub XVIII wieku i prawdopodobnie na skutek obcych wpływów.

Niniejsza praca nie odrzuca całkowicie możliwości, aby niektóre z tak zwanych grobów atypowych należały do osób, których pośmiertnej aktywności się obawiano. Jej celem jest jednak pokazanie, że nienormatywne zabiegi pogrzebowe wiązać się mogły także z całą gamą innych zjawisk i że nie zawsze nietypowa forma pochówku wyrażać musiała skrajnie negatywne treści. Aby lepiej zilustrować ten problem, posłużono się m.in. koncepcją złej śmierci.

Dobra i zła śmierć

Złą śmierć można zdefiniować na wiele sposobów, ale zasadniczo jest to śmierć, która nastąpiła w nietypowy sposób i/lub w nietypowych okolicznościach i która w efekcie sprawiać może, że - w przekonaniu ludu - zmarli powstają z grobów oraz powracają do świata żywych. Zdaniem francuskiego badacza Claude'a Lecouteux:

> Koncepcja ta sprawia, że samobójcy, osoby, których życie zostało brutalnie przerwane żelazem, sznurem, wodą, ogniem - krótko mówiąc, zmarli przedwcześnie (*immaturi, aori*) - stanowią większość powracających. Dochodzą do tego osoby, których życie było niepokojące dla społeczności, a zatem wszyscy, których można by nazwać „czarownikami", albo także ludzie źli albo ci, którzy mają szczególne cechy fizyczne (znamiona). Również ci, którzy urodzili się w określonym dniu, o określonej godzinie uważanej za pechową; urodzili się w czepku albo mają podwójne zęby; pełnili pewne zawody - kowal i drwal budzą lęk, pasterze są podejrzani - w sumie wszyscy, którzy nie stapiają się z masą swych współczesnych, ludzie marginesu, świętokradcy, zazdrośnicy; których maltretowano za życia i którzy chcą się zemścić, których zgon był dziwny albo nie zostali pochowani zgodnie z rytuałami; którzy pozostali bez pochówku (*insepulti*); których pochowano bez sakramentów albo w miejscu, które im nie odpowiadało, lub obok sąsiada, którego nienawidzili za życia; których strój lub całun były nieodpowiednie. Są też ci, którzy zostawili na ziemi niedokończone dzieło, nieodchowane dzieci albo niedotrzymaną obietnicę; których woli nie wypełniono, a także ci, których za bardzo opłakiwano: nasze łzy moczą ich całun i nie mogą odpoczywać w pokoju.[1]

Materiały archeologiczne pozwalają czasem na interpretację niektórych form grobów jako należących do osób, które zmarły złą śmiercią. Najbardziej przekonywujące w tym zakresie są właśnie znaleziska tak zwanych grobów atypowych.

Przystępując do dyskusji o grobach atypowych (określanych w zagranicznej literaturze różnymi terminami, najczęściej jako ang. *deviant burials/graves* lub ang. *atypical burials/graves*), konieczne jest najpierw podanie ich ogólnej definicji. W niniejszej książce przyjęto definicję zaproponowaną przez Edeltraud Aspöck:

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[1] Lecouteux 2011, s. 29-30.

> Minimalna definicja pochówków/grobów atypowych, z którą zgodzi się większość badaczy, jest taka, że są to pochówki/groby, które różnią się od normatywnych praktyk pogrzebowych w danym okresie, na danym regionie i/lub cmentarzysku. Odmienność ta może dotyczyć sposobu ułożenia ciała lub jego potraktowania, bądź też ulokowania grobu, jego konstrukcji czy charakteru przedmiotów i innych dóbr towarzyszących zmarłym.[2]

Przed dokładnym omówieniem różnych wariantów pochówków/grobów atypowych w świecie dawnych Słowian w Rozdziale 1 zarysowane zostały dzieje badań nad podobnymi zjawiskami funeralnymi w Europie Zachodniej i Północnej, przede wszystkim w odniesieniu do społeczności anglosaskich i skandynawskich. Tak przyjęta perspektywa porównawcza jest w pełni uzasadniona, gdyż w okresie wczesnego średniowiecza społeczności te znajdowały się na zbliżonym poziomie kulturowym i wszystkie przechodziły istotne transformacje związane z przyjęciem chrześcijaństwa oraz konsolidacją władzy monarszej. Ponadto materiały archeologiczne z terenów anglosaskich i skandynawskich, dotyczące zjawiska pochówków atypowych, poddane zostały w ostatnich latach szczegółowym i interdyscyplinarnym analizom oraz opublikowane w formie obszernych, syntetycznych monografii oraz artykułów. Do najważniejszych z wydanych niedawno studiów należy zbiorowy tom pod redakcją Eileen Murphy pt. *Deviant Burial in the Archaeological Record* oraz monografia Andrew Reynoldsa pt. *Anglo-Saxon Deviant Burial Customs.* Atypowe praktyki pogrzebowe ze Skandynawii omówione zostały w cyklu prac wydanych m.in. przez Evę Thäte, Leszka Gardełę oraz Matthiasa Toplaka. Znaczący przyrost syntetycznych opracowań materiałów anglosaskich i skandynawskich sprawia, że zjawisko atypowych praktyk pogrzebowych na ziemiach polskich może być omówione na wyjątkowo szerokim tle porównawczym i z uwzględnieniem nowych, wcześniej nieaplikowanych metod i perspektyw teoretycznych. Warto zauważyć, że w Wielkiej Brytanii i Skandynawii rozmaite aspekty pochówków atypowych badane są w sposób interdyscyplinarny i przy czynnym udziale historyków, socjologów, antropologów, religioznawców i filologów. Również tam fenomen pochówków atypowych często wiązany jest ze wspomnianą wyżej koncepcją złej śmierci.

Jak dotąd w archeologii polskiej nie podejmowano większych prób zbadania zjawiska pochówków atypowych w perspektywie porównawczej. Choć ukazał się szereg studiów poświęconych wybranym ich aspektom, nadal brakowało ich syntetycznego ujęcia. Wszystko to sprawiało, że dawne poglądy utrzymywały się w nauce i prowadziły niejednokrotnie do uproszczonego lub wręcz błędnego obrazu dawnych praktyk pogrzebowych. Wychodząc naprzeciw tym problemom, celem niniejszej monografii jest analiza szerokiego spektrum wczesnośredniowiecznych pochówków atypowych z ziem polskich przy wykorzystaniu interdyscyplinarnego warsztatu badawczego oraz inspiracji płynących z takich dziedzin nauki jak antropologia kulturowa, socjologia czy historia religii. Ramy chronologiczne pracy zamykają się w okresie od schyłku X wieku do końca wieku XIII, ale autor sięga również do materiałów z późniejszych okresów dziejowych. Przeprowadzone analizy bazują na materiałach archiwalnych pozyskanych w różnych placówkach naukowych na terenie Polski i za granicą, a także w oparciu o opublikowaną literaturę przedmiotu.

Rozdział 2: Od Nawii do Nieba. Śmierć w świecie Słowian

W Rozdziale 2 przedstawiono zarys praktyk pogrzebowych, które dokonywane były na terenach ziem polskich przede wszystkim w okresie od X–XIII wieku. Skupiono się tutaj jednak nie tylko na opisie ich rozmaitych form w poszczególnych regionach, ale także nakreślono dzieje polskich studiów nad śmiercią we wczesnym średniowieczu oraz omówiono zmieniające się w czasie trendy badawcze. Ponadto, wykorzystując różne kategorie źródeł, podjęto próbę rekonstrukcji skomplikowanych procesów, które poprzedzały sam akt pochówku, a także tych, które następowały po złożeniu ciała do grobu.

Traktowanie zmarłych we wczesnym średniowieczu

W okresie wczesnego średniowiecza na ziemiach polskich praktykowano zasadniczo dwie dystynktywne formy pochówku – kremację i inhumację. W różnych regionach praktyki te przybierały rozmaite formy i wraz z upływem czasu ulegały transformacjom. Na podstawie zachowanych materiałów archeologicznych pochodzących z cmentarzysk oraz przy wykorzystaniu źródeł pisanych i etnograficznych, podjęta została próba zrekonstruowania słowiańskich wyobrażeń na temat śmierci i zaświatów, a także sposobów w jakie traktowani byli zmarli na przestrzeni dziejów na ziemiach polskich.

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[2] Aspöck 2008, s. 17.

W podjętej tutaj rekonstrukcji słowiańskich obrzędów pogrzebowych skupiono uwagę na zabiegach, które poprzedzały i towarzyszyły aktowi pochówku, a także tym które potencjalnie odbywać się mogły na cmentarzyskach już po złożeniu ciała lub jego szczątków do grobu. Szczególną uwagę skupiono na performatywnych aspektach zabiegów pogrzebowych i na złożonej symbolice aktów związanych z przygotowywaniem ciała do pochówku (np. mycie i ubieranie zwłok, czesanie oraz układanie włosów etc.). Następnie omówiono różne sposoby transportowania ciała na miejsce pogrzebu i zauważono, że mogło być ono przewożone na wozach lub łodziach albo niesione na marach lub w trumnach. Co znamienne, na niektórych cmentarzyskach wczesnośredniowiecznych z ziem polskich znajdowane są w grobach ślady mar, trumien czy łodzi-dłubanek – prócz czysto praktycznej funkcji tego rodzaju „pojemników", niewykluczone jest, że miały one do spełnienia także szereg innych ról o charakterze symbolicznym.

Po przeniesieniu ciała na miejsce pochówku zwłoki mogły zostać złożone do ziemi niespalone lub poddane procesowi kremacji. W kolejnych sekcjach tego rozdziału omówiono najważniejsze cechy tych dwóch, jakże różnych od siebie, form traktowania zwłok.

Praktyka palenia zmarłych zaczęła zanikać na terenie wczesnośredniowiecznej Polski wraz z momentem przyjęcia chrześcijaństwa, czyli w drugiej połowie X wieku. Na podstawie odkrytych cmentarzysk ciałopalnych wiemy jednak, że w okresie przedchrześcijańskim istniała szeroka gama sposobów, w jakie traktowano i grzebano spalone szczątki – na przykład były one umieszczane w naczyniach ceramicznych lub pojemnikach wykonanych z materiałów organicznych. Okazjonalnie w grobach ciałopalnych znajduje się niewielkie przedmioty wykonane z żelaza, ale zasadniczo ich wyposażenie jest bardzo skromne (zdecydowanie uboższe niż znajdowane na terenie anglosaskiej Anglii czy Skandynawii z epoki wikingów). Po złożeniu spalonych szczątków w ziemi, sypano nad nimi kopiec, czasem z dodatkowymi elementami kamiennymi lub dookolnym rowem bądź płotem. Kopce te miały zazwyczaj niewielkie rozmiary, choć z ziem polskich znane są także formy bardziej monumentalne, jak chociażby słynny Kopiec Krakusa w Krakowie.

Wraz z przyjęciem chrześcijaństwa przez elity państwa Piastów w praktykach pogrzebowych nastąpiła drastyczna zmiana i ciałopalenie zaczęło zanikać, stopniowo ustępując miejsca inhumacji. Niemniej jednak, pomimo religijnej konwersji, podejmowane wówczas praktyki pogrzebowe stanowiły niejednokrotnie wyraz synkretyzmu zwyczajów przedchrześcijańskich z tymi, które dyktowało chrześcijaństwo. Przyglądając się zabiegom inhumacji w okresie pomiędzy XI a XIII wiekiem w sposób bardziej całościowy, a także analizując je w szerszej perspektywie czasowej i terytorialnej, dostrzegamy, że cechowały się one na ziemiach polskich znaczną różnorodnością. Zewnętrzne struktury grobów najczęściej były płaskie, a niewielkie kopce sypano tylko nad niektórymi z nich. Jednakże na Mazowszu oraz na szeregu cmentarzysk w Wielkopolsce i Polsce Środkowej groby były przykrywane/oznaczane kamieniami, czasem tworzącymi rodzaj kamiennego płaszcza. Wewnętrzne struktury grobów również były różnorodne – zazwyczaj zmarli grzebani byli w jamach, bez dodatkowych konstrukcji drewnianych, ale zdarzały się przypadki szalowania jam grobowych drewnem i tworzenia w ten sposób swoistej komory. Groby tego typu, czasami mające dodatkowe drewniane podłogi i zadaszenia, określane są mianem grobów komorowych. Warto dodać, że zarówno w grobach pozbawionych komór jak i tych z komorami niektórzy zmarli chowani byli w trumnach.

W poszczególnych częściach Polski zdarzają się też przypadki układania zwłok na łodziach jednopiennych, czyli tak zwanych dłubankach – są to jednak przypadki dość rzadkie.

Zasadniczo w grobach szkieletowych znajduje się znacznie szerszą gamę przedmiotów niż w grobach ciałopalnych. Zmarłym towarzyszyć mogą rozmaite naczynia wykonane z materiałów organicznych i nieorganicznych, narzędzia, broń (miecze, topory, włócznie) oraz biżuteria. Czasami w grobach odkrywane są także szczątki zwierzęce, ale nie w formie całych sztuk zwierząt, a raczej ich fragmentów. Trudno dziś określić, czy stanowiły one pożywienie dla zmarłych, czy pełniły jakąś inną rolę obrzędową – niewykluczone, że przypisywano im różne znaczenia w zależności od okoliczności.

Na podstawie zachowanych źródeł archeologicznych i pisanych nie jest łatwo zrekonstruować przebieg dawnych pogrzebów i poznać jakie działania toczyły się w obrębie przestrzeni samego cmentarzyska. Najprawdopodobniej zabiegom związanym ze śmiercią towarzyszyły różne performanse, w trakcie których recytowano poezję lub śpiewano pieśni, a także odgrywano różne sceny być może nawiązujące do wydarzeń z życia zmarłej osoby lub opowieści mitycznych. Czeski kronikarz Kosmas wspomina również, że w trakcie pogrzebów tańczono w maskach. Nie ulega wątpliwości, że praktykom funeralnym towarzyszyła także stypa (określana czasem jako *strawa*), podczas której spożywano jadło i napoje. Być może niektóre luźne znaleziska ceramiki na powierzchni cmentarzysk wczesnośredniowiecznych są właśnie śladem po tego typu ucztach.

Interesującym zjawiskiem są też próby interakcji ze zmarłymi lub ingerencji w przestrzeń grobu po dokonaniu aktu pochówku. Współcześnie tego rodzaju działania są czasem kojarzone z rabunkiem, choć należy przyznać, że otwieranie grobów nie zawsze umotywowane było chęcią pozyskania cennych przedmiotów lub kości. Motyw otwierania grobów został omówiony bardziej szczegółowo w Rozdziale 7 niniejszej książki.

Istotnym zagadnieniem, któremu poświęcono sporo uwagi w Rozdziale 2, jest znaczenie przedmiotów złożonych wraz ze zmarłymi w grobach szkieletowych. Jak wspomniano powyżej, były wśród nich m.in. rozmaite naczynia, narzędzia, broń oraz biżuteria. W tradycyjnych, kulturowo-historycznych podejściach do materiałów funeralnych przedmioty składane do grobów postrzegane były przede wszystkim jako należące do zmarłych i reprezentujące rozmaite role, które ci pełnili przed śmiercią. Dzisiejsi badacze podchodzą do tych kwestii znacznie bardziej ostrożnie i podkreślają, że groby nie są „lustrami życia", bezpośrednio i klarownie odbijającymi tożsamości oraz profesje zmarłych. W kolejnych sekcjach tego rozdziału omówiono różne możliwości interpretowania przedmiotów składanych wraz ze zmarłymi do grobów, szczególną uwagę poświęcając biżuterii i tzw. amuletom, a także broni, naczyniom (glinianym, drewnianym, metalowym) oraz różnorodnym narzędziom i utensyliom.

Biżuteria w grobach mogła pełnić wiele funkcji. Z jednej strony jej użycie pozwalało na wyeksponowanie zwłok w trakcie pochówku w wizualnie atrakcyjny i estetyczny sposób, co miało również rolę mnemoniczną – pozwalało bowiem żałobnikom na zapamiętanie zmarłej osoby w sposób jak najbardziej korzystny, na przykład jako dobrze ubranej, dostojnej czy zamożnej. Z drugiej strony niektóre elementy biżuterii mogły pełnić dodatkową rolę i służyć jako amulety dające zmarłym jakiejś magiczne korzyści i/lub mające funkcje ochronne. Niektóre rodzaje biżuterii – jak na przykład kabłączki skroniowe – świadczyć mogły o przynależności do określonej grupy społecznej, a może nawet do danego plemienia czy rodu. Były one także dystynktywnym sposobem ozdabiania głowy przez Słowianki i wyjątkowo sporadycznie zdarza się by tego rodzaju ozdoby były znajdowane w grobach zawierających np. przedmioty emblematyczne dla obcej kultury (np. skandynawskiej).

Broń znajdowana w grobach, podobnie jak inne przedmioty, także komunikowała różnorodne treści. Jakkolwiek we wcześniejszych badaniach uzbrojenie w kontekstach funeralnych postrzegane było jako wyznacznik statusu i profesji wojownika, to dziś dostrzega się inne, symboliczne role militariów. Warto też podkreślić, że przypadku ziem wczesnośredniowiecznej Polski, broń znajdowana jest w grobach stosunkowo rzadko, a zatem niemożliwe jest stwierdzenie, że tylko i wyłącznie groby z uzbrojeniem są grobami wojowników – jak na tak rozwinięty system grodowy tego rodzaju grobów jest zdecydowanie zbyt mało. W tym świetle jasne jest, że wojaczką mogli parać się za życia również ludzie pochowani bez jakiegokolwiek uzbrojenia. Nie jest wykluczone, że gdy wojownik umierał, jego wyposażenie militarne przekazywane było innym osobom, na przykład władcy, kompanom czy rodzinie.

Interesującą kategorią przedmiotów znajdowanych w kontekstach funeralnych są naczynia. One także – podobnie jak inne sprzęty – posiadać mogły różne funkcje i znaczenia. Z jednej strony mogły one stanowić pojemniki na jedzenie lub napoje i czasem badania specjalistyczne są w stanie określić jakie substancje się w nich znajdowały (np. mleko, ryby, mięso). Nie wiemy niestety, czy owo jedzenie należy postrzegać w kategoriach darów dla zmarłych i pokarmu na drogę w zaświaty czy pełniło ono jakieś inne funkcje. Nie jest też wykluczone, że składanie do grobów określonych typów naczyń sygnalizowało prestiż czy pozycję społeczną zmarłych i/lub tych, którzy aktywnie uczestniczyli w ceremoniach pogrzebowych.

We wczesnośredniowiecznych grobach z ziem polskich znajdowane są także różnego typu narzędzia czy utensylia. Najpowszechniejsze z nich to żelazne noże, ale sporadycznie odkrywane są także m.in. grzebienie, igły, krzesiwa, osełki, nożyce, klucze, sierpy, haczyki do łowienia ryb i szydła. Trudno jest dziś określić jaką dokładnie rolę pełniły te przedmioty w kontekstach funeralnych. Niewykluczone, że były one własnością samych zmarłych, którzy używali ich za życia do różnych celów, ale równie dobrze mogły to być rzeczy należące do żałobników, którzy poprzez akt zdeponowania ich w grobie chcieli coś zakomunikować. Możliwości interpretacyjnych jest wiele, co zmusza do dużej ostrożności w podejmowaniu prób określania tożsamości i profesji zmarłych na podstawie narzędzi czy utensyliów, które towarzyszyły im w grobach. Niewykluczone, że przedmioty te odgrywały jakąś istotną rolę w trakcie ceremonii pogrzebowych jeszcze przed złożeniem ciała do grobu lub że miały one w jakimś celu służyć zmarłym podczas drogi w zaświaty lub ich pobytu tamże. Być może w niektórych przypadkach narzędzia znajdowane w kontekstach funeralnych pełniły funkcję apotropeiczną – albo zabezpieczającą żywych przed zmarłymi, albo zmarłych przed żywymi. Problemu znaczenia składania narzędzi do grobów nie da się mierzyć jedną miarą i wyjaśnić w prosty sposób – najprawdopodobniej ich role zmieniały się w zależności od miejsca, czasu i woli jednostek lub grup, które uczestniczyły w ceremoniach pogrzebowych.

Wyobrażenia zaświatów. Ikonograficzne przedstawienia słowiańskiego kosmosu

Po omówieniu źródeł archeologicznych ukazujących różne warianty praktyk pogrzebowych dokonywanych na terenie ziem polskich we wczesnym średniowieczu, kolejne części Rozdziału 2 poświęcone są próbie rekonstrukcji słowiańskich wyobrażeń kosmologicznych. Materiały funeralne – w formie cmentarzysk, grobów i ich zawartości – stanowią istotne źródła do poznania sposobów, w jakie dawni Słowianie wyobrażali sobie dalszą pośmiertną egzystencję. Podstawowym problemem badawczym w głębszym poznaniu słowiańskich koncepcji zaświatów jest jednak brak szczegółowych przekazów na ich temat w zachowanych do dziś źródłach pisanych. Mimo to na podstawie uważnej analizy materiałów ikonograficznych, a także niektórych zachowanych źródeł etnograficznych, wydaje się możliwe odsłonięcie choć częściowego ich obrazu oraz zarysowanie podstawowych koncepcji kosmologicznych.

Zdaniem autora do najważniejszych źródeł mogących rzucić nieco światła na to, jak wczesnośredniowieczni Słowianie wyobrażali sobie świat są takie znaleziska jak słynny idol ze Zbrucza (znany także jako Światowid ze Zbrucza), wykonane ze stopów miedzi okucia pochewek noży z motywami zoomorficznymi i antropomorficznymi, a także ostrogi typu lutomierskiego. Na podstawie programu ikonograficznego ukazanego na tych trzech kategoriach zabytków, można przypuszczać, że wszystkie one stanowią wyobrażenie osi świata (tzw. *axis mundi*). W tym świetle zasadny wydaje się argument, że przedstawione na nich postaci antropomorficzne nawiązują do słowiańskich bogów Świętowita/Peruna oraz Trzygłowa/Welesa i właściwych im domen nieba oraz podziemi, zaś istoty zoomorficzne są przedstawieniami ludzkich dusz (Słowianie wierzyli, że dusze mogły przybierać postać bydła lub ptaków) lub być może nadnaturalnych mediatorów, przemieszczających się pomiędzy (za)światami. Wydaje się, że zabytki te korespondują ze śladowymi informacjami na temat słowiańskiego kosmosu zawartymi w źródłach pisanych, z których wyłania się przekonanie o trójpodziale świata (niebo-ziemia-podziemia). W przypadku niektórych okuć pochewek noży można też pokusić się o przypuszczenie, że umieszczenie postaci antropomorficznych na obu ich przeciwstawnych końcach wyraża dualizm słowiańskich wierzeń przedrześcijańskich i ilustruje antagonistyczną zależność pomiędzy dwoma najważniejszymi bogami w ich panteonie – Świętowitem/Perunem oraz Trzygłowem/Welesem.

Zmarli i zaświaty

Jakkolwiek możliwe jest rzucenie nieco światła na temat słowiańskich wyobrażeń kosmologicznych, o wiele trudniejsze jest poznanie szczegółów tego, jak ich zdaniem wyglądać mogło życie po śmierci. Zachowane źródła pisane są do tego stopnia lakoniczne, że nie jest z nich nawet jasne czy wczesnośredniowieczni Słowianie znali koncepcję duszy. Dowody pośrednie, w formie późniejszych przekazów etnograficznych i źródeł porównawczych, wskazują jednak, że koncepcja duszy raczej nie mogła być im obca. Źródła te pokazują również, że w określonych momentach roku dusze ludzkie mogły odwiedzać żywych i należało wówczas być bardzo ostrożnym, aby ich nie urazić bądź zranić.

Podobne trudności badawcze dotyczą też charakteru zaświatów i miejsc, do których po śmierci mogli udawać się zmarli. Średniowieczne źródła pisane są w tych kwestiach bardzo zdawkowe, a kronikarz Thietmar twierdzi wręcz, że dla Słowian wraz ze śmiercią wszystko miało się kończyć. Taka wizja nie wydaje się prawdziwa i przeczą jej inne przekazy pośrednie. Ebbo, na przykład, opisując świątynię Trzygłowa w Szczecinie mówi o tym, że posąg boga miał trzy głowy, a każda z nich odpowiedzialna była za jeden z trzech światów – niebo, ziemię i podziemia, co świadczy o tym, że istniały różne krainy, do których udawać się mogli zmarli.

W językach słowiańskich zachowały się także specyficzne terminy takie jak naw/nav, które nawiązywały do istot nadnaturalnych, w które przekształcili się zmarli (w tym osoby, które odeszły tzw. złą śmiercią), a w formie Nawia/Navia były one także określeniem samych zaświatów. Określenia naw/nav mogą też nawiązywać do enigmatycznego bóstwa ze słowiańskiego panteonu – tzw. Nyji, postaci identyfikowanej z greckim Plutonem, której przypisuje się kompetencje chtoniczne.

Istnieją ponadto śladowe przekazy na temat innych zaświatów, określanych jako Wyraj, Raj lub Irij. Miały one znajdować się za wodą, która stanowiła naturalną barierę ale także drogę ku nim prowadzącą. Co ciekawe, do owych zaświatów trafiać mogli zarówno ludzie jak i zwierzęta. Na podstawie tych i innych przesłanek niektórzy badacze argumentują, że słowiańskie zaświaty mogły być wyobrażane w formie wyspy. Poświadczeniem o tego rodzaju przekonaniach o zaświatach mogą być znajdowane na niektórych cmentarzyskach z ziem polskich groby, w których zmarli pochowani zostali na łodziach jednopiennych.

W podsumowaniu Rozdziału 2 autor stwierdza, że najprawdopodobniej dawni Słowianie – podobnie jak inne ludy wczesnośredniowieczne, np. Skandynawowie czy Anglosasi – wierzyli w istnienie kilku różnych miejsc pośmiertnego bytowania. Dodatkowym poświadczeniem o istnieniu szeregu koncepcji na temat zaświatów (w tym także sposobów dotarcia do nich) oraz złożonego charakteru życia po śmierci jest różnorodność zabiegów pogrzebowych rejestrowanych na wczesnośredniowiecznych cmentarzyskach. Różnorodność ta dotyczy zarówno ich struktury wewnętrznej (np. rozmaite przenośne i nieprzenośne konstrukcje grobowe i wyposażenie zmarłych) jak i zewnętrznej (kopce, płaszcze kamienne, groby płaskie itd.). Niestety dostępne nam dziś źródła (zarówno archeologiczne jak i pisane) są zazwyczaj zbyt mgliste, aby można było bardziej szczegółowo naświetlić charakter wierzeń na temat życia po śmierci. Mimo wszystko zasadne wydaje się przypuszczenie, że jakkolwiek spora część zmarłych przenosiła się do jakiejś zaświatowej krainy, to w przekonaniu dawnych Słowian mogli istnieć też tacy, którzy z określonych powodów pozostawali wśród żywych, czasem czyniąc im szkody. Specyficzne zabiegi funeralne mające między innymi zapobiec negatywnemu wpływowi zmarłych omawiane są bardziej szczegółowo w kolejnych rozdziałach niniejszej pracy.

Rozdział 3: Poszukiwanie wampirów w Polsce. Dzieje badań, kontrowersje, reinterpretacje

Rozdział 3 omawia skomplikowaną oraz często kontrowersyjną historię badań nad wczesno- i późnośredniowiecznymi pochówkami atypowymi na ziemiach polskich. Jego celem jest przede wszystkim odkrycie okoliczności, w jakich narodziły się interpretacje łączące różne formy pochówków atypowych z wiarą w wampiry, a także omówienie wpływu jaki te poglądy wywarły na archeologię średniowiecza w Polsce.

Historia badań nad pochówkami atypowymi w Polsce

Pierwsze odkrycia tak zwanych pochówków atypowych dokonane zostały już w latach trzydziestych XX wieku, lecz przez kolejne dwie dekady lat archeolodzy nie podejmowali żadnych większych prób ich interpretacji. Pierwszym opublikowanym grobem atypowym z wczesnego średniowiecza na ziemiach polskich był grób nr 2 z Gwiazdowa (woj. wielkopolskie). Opisany on został jako należący do kobiety, która złożona została w pozycji na brzuchu. W grobie tym znaleziono między innymi trzy kabłączki skroniowe oraz żelazny nóż w pochewce zdobionej blachą ze stopu miedzi. Niestety nigdy nie został opublikowany plan tego grobu ani nie przeprowadzono dokładnych analiz antropologicznych, co sprawia, że wiele cennych informacji zostało bezpowrotnie utraconych.

Brak szerszego zainteresowania pochówkami atypowymi w pierwszej połowie XX wieku jest też wypadkową ówczesnych trendów i paradygmatów badawczych oraz dominacji podejścia kulturowo-historycznego w archeologii polskiej. W tamtym okresie badacze przede wszystkim skupiali się na kulturowej i chronologicznej klasyfikacji dokonanych odkryć, niejednokrotnie marginalizując ich znaczenia symboliczne.

W polskiej literaturze naukowej słowo „wampir" w odniesieniu do wczesnośredniowiecznego grobu po raz pierwszy użyte zostało w pracy Jerzego Gąssowskiego wydanej w 1950 r. i omawiającej wyniki badań na wczesnośredniowiecznym cmentarzysku szkieletowym w Radomiu. Za potencjalnego wampira uznano mężczyznę, który pochowany był na boku (częściowo na brzuchu) i przykryty kilkunastoma kamieniami o różnej wielkości. Warto podkreślić, że jakkolwiek w pracy Gąssowskiego pojawiło się słowo „wampir", to autor ten nie próbował w żaden sposób wyjaśnić tej interpretacji ani też nie odniósł się do jakiejkolwiek literatury dotyczącej zjawiska wampiryzmu lub do znalezisk podobnych grobów z innych kontekstów kulturowych.

Kolejne lata i wzmożone kampanie wykopaliskowe na cmentarzyskach wczesnośredniowiecznych w różnych częściach Polski - często prowadzone w ramach programu tak zwanych Badań Millenijnych - doprowadziły do znalezienia nowych przypadków grobów atypowych. Ich odkrywcy, zainspirowani między innymi publikacją Gąssowskiego oraz przekazami etnograficznymi na temat żywych trupów, które zawarte były w słynnej monografii Kazimierza Moszyńskiego (*Kultura ludowa Słowian*), coraz chętniej zaczęli określać tego typu znaleziska mianem grobów wampirów lub upiorów. Przykładem może być tutaj grób nr 8 z cmentarzyska wczesnośredniowiecznego w Buczku (woj. łódzkie), gdzie rzekomo na szczątkach zmarłego znaleziono ślady po drewnianym kołku, co zrodziło wśród badaczy przypuszczenia, że grób ten należeć mógł do upiora. Nowsze badania i studia archiwalne pokazały, że nie tylko ta sensacyjna interpretacja była całkowicie chybiona, ale również, że ów domniemany kołek wcale nie przebijał ciała, jak wcześniej sądzono.

Przełomowym momentem w polskich badaniach nad fenomenem pochówków atypowych był artykuł pt. *Niezwykłe pochówki na Kujawach* opublikowany w 1957 r. przez Bonifacego Zielonkę w popularno-naukowym czasopiśmie *Z Otchłani Wieków*[3]. Badacz ten omówił w nim szereg nietypowych grobów - m.in. grób mężczyzny, którego głowa została odcięta i ułożona między nogami oraz grób kobiety, która pochowana została w pozycji na brzuchu. Co ciekawe, Zielonka podkreślił w swoim artykule, że jeden z pracowników fizycznych, którzy towarzyszyli mu w trakcie wykopalisk, określił pierwszy z wymienionych grobów jako należący do „strzygi". Ponadto w pracy Zielonki zacytowany został także przekaz znany jako *Casus de strigis*, w którym opisano wydarzenia mające miejsce w Trzeszawie(?) w 1674 r. gdzie wiejska społeczność cierpiała z powodu negatywnych działań mężczyzny, który powstał ze swojego grobu i czynił rozmaite szkody. Lokalny ksiądz nakazał rozkopać grób i odwrócić ciało twarzą do ziemi. Gdy to nie pomogło, grób został ponownie otwarty, a mężczyźnie odcięto głowę. Zarówno artykuł Zielonki jak i zawarty w nim przekaz rozbudziły wyobraźnię kolejnych pokoleń polskich archeologów oraz sprawiały, że chętnie interpretowali oni kolejne nietypowe groby jako należące do różnych typów tzw. żywych trupów (np. strzyg, wampirów czy upiorów), często bez podejmowania głębszych prób rozpatrywania ich w innym świetle.

W latach sześćdziesiątych pojawiło się kilka prac, które groby atypowe postrzegały jako należące do upiorów, ale dopiero w latach siedemdziesiątych termin „grób/pochówek antywampiryczny" na dobre zagościł w archeologii polskiej. Stało się to za sprawą wydania słynnej dziś monografii Heleny Zoll-Adamikowej, w której tym ogólnym mianem określono szereg zabiegów pogrzebowych rejestrowanych na cmentarzyskach w Małopolsce i innych częściach kraju[4]. Szeroka akceptacja terminu „pochówek antywampiryczny" w polskim środowisku naukowym była prawdopodobnie wynikiem bardzo prominentnej pozycji, jaką cieszyła się Zoll-Adamikowa, choć należy podkreślić, że ta uznana badaczka starała się w swojej pracy pokazać, że pochówki atypowe mogą być interpretowane też na wiele innych sposobów. Dziś można z przekonaniem powiedzieć, że była ona o wiele bardziej ostrożna w swoich poglądach niż całe rzesze badaczy, którzy później śmiało i czasem zupełnie bezrefleksyjnie czerpali z jej dorobku.

Oprócz pracy Zoll-Adamikowej w latach siedemdziesiątych pojawiło się również ważne opracowanie wczesnośredniowiecznego cmentarzyska w Brześciu Kujawskim, gdzie zarejestrowano kilka grobów o cechach atypowych. Autorzy tej publikacji postrzegali niektóre z nich jako potencjalnie należące do osób, których pośmiertnej aktywności się obawiano, ale sygnalizowali także alternatywne ścieżki interpretacji, na przykład sugerując, że osoby pozbawione kończyn mogły być przestępcami.

Jak widzieliśmy, okres od lat trzydziestych do późnych lat siedemdziesiątych XX wieku był czasem raczej znikomego zainteresowania problematyką pochówków atypowych. Podobnie jak inne przejawy dawnych wierzeń i praktyk rytualnych, pozostawały one na marginesie naukowych rozważań, które w większości utrzymane były w tradycyjnym nurcie kulturowo-historycznym. Wszystko to zaczęło ulegać zmianom od lat dziewięćdziesiątych.

Istotnym przełomem u schyłku lat dziewięćdziesiątych był cykl prac Łukasza Maurycego Stanaszka poświęconych problematyce grobów atypowych, który zwieńczony został pracą magisterską pt. *Wampiryzm we wczesnym średniowieczu. Próba całościowej analizy*

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[3] Zielonka 1957.

[4] Zoll-Adamikowa 1966; 1971.

problemu ze szczególnym uwzględnieniem obszaru Polski[5]. Jako antropolog, Stanaszek przyjrzał się materiałom kostnym pochodzącym z różnych grobów tej kategorii i korzystając ponadto ze źródeł etnograficznych sformułował hipotezę, że mogły one należeć do osób, których pośmiertnej aktywności się obawiano. W swoich badaniach Stanaszek opierał się na wcześniejszych ustaleniach Heleny Zoll-Adamikowej, ale czerpał też z zagranicznych prac badaczy wampiryzmu – między innymi odwołując się do wspomnianego wcześniej, słynnego studium Dom Augustina Calmeta. Ważnym dokonaniem Stanaszka było stworzenie katalogu wczesnośredniowiecznych grobów wykazujących cechy atypowe, który w kolejnych latach stał się podstawą do dalszych, pogłębionych studiów.

Przełom XX i XXI wieku przyniósł kolejne prace poświęcone problematyce pochówków atypowych. Warto w tym miejscu zwrócić uwagę na cykl konferencji antropologiczno-archeologicznych zatytułowanych Funeralia Lednickie. W 1999 r. w ich ramach zorganizowano spotkanie pt. „Czarownice", które w całości poświęcone było nienormatywnym zabiegom funeralnym z różnych epok. Opublikowany tom zawierający teksty wygłoszonych wówczas wystąpień na długo stał się istotnym punktem odniesienia w badaniach nad tymi zagadnieniami. Szczególnie ważny był krytyczny artykuł Jacka Wrzesińskiego,[6] w którym badacz ten zwrócił uwagę na szereg problemów metodologicznych związanych z odkryciami grobów atypowych oraz wskazał rozmaite błędy interpretacyjne popełniane przez wcześniejszych badaczy.

W 2004 roku ukazał się też artykuł Przemysława Żydoka pt. *Wczesnośredniowieczne pochówki antywampiryczne*[7]. Tekst ten był skróconą wersją pracy magisterskiej tegoż autora i zawierał rozbudowany katalog wczesnośredniowiecznych grobów wykazujących cechy atypowe. Artykuł Żydoka – choć przedstawiający bardzo jednowymiarowe interpretacje, sprowadzające się do uznania wszystkich przypadków grobów atypowych z ziem polskich za wyrażające strach przed wampirami – został dobrze przyjęty w polskim środowisku naukowym i przez wiele kolejnych lat był powszechnie cytowany bez krytycznej refleksji.

W 2008 roku wydany został artykuł Antoniego Porzezińskiego zatytułowany *Wczesnośredniowieczne pochówki antywampiryczne na nekropolach w Cedyni (stan. 2 i 2a)*[8]. Podobnie jak jego poprzednicy Porzeziński czerpał swoje inspiracje z prac Zoll-Adamikowej, Stanaszka i Żydoka, nie podejmując niemal żadnych prób umieszczenia zjawiska pochówków atypowych na szerszym tle porównawczym i nie odwołując się do zagranicznej literatury przedmiotu, dotyczącej fenomenu wampiryzmu. W efekcie wszystkie znalezione w Cedyni groby wykazujące atypowe cechy zostały bezkrytycznie uznane za należące do osób, których pośmiertnej aktywności się obawiano. Zaletą artykułu Porzezińskiego jest jednak zamieszczony w niej katalog grobów atypowych ze stanowiska 2 oraz 2a w Cedyni wzbogacony starannymi ilustracjami.

Z problemem pochówków atypowych zmierzył się w 2008 r. również Andrzej Marek Wyrwa w artykule *Zabobony, „wampiry" i remedia antywampiryczne. Przyczynek do poznania zachowań funeralnych*[9]. Tekst ten skupia się zasadniczo na materiałach późnośredniowiecznych i nowożytnych, stanowiąc przy tym jeden z pierwszych bardziej szczegółowych studiów atypowych praktyk funeralnych datowanych od XIV wieku. Jakkolwiek Wyrwa widzi większość z nich jako wyraz strachu przed wampirami lub innymi rodzajami żywych trupów, to jego artykuł jest znacznie bardziej merytorycznie poprawny niż wiele z wcześniej przywoływanych studiów.

Nowe perspektywy w badaniach nad pochówkami atypowymi

W ciągu ostatniej dekady polscy badacze zaczęli podchodzić do problemu pochówków atypowych w sposób znacznie bardziej ostrożny niż ich poprzednicy oraz studiować je w perspektywie interdyscyplinarnej i porównawczej. Jednymi z najistotniejszych przejawów tych zmian są próby rozpatrywania fenomenu pochówków atypowych w kontekście dawnych praktyk związanych z egzekwowaniem prawa. Jakkolwiek szereg wcześniejszych badaczy – takich jak na przykład Jerzy Gąssowski, Eleonora i Zdzisław Kaszewscy, Eugeniusz Cnotliwy czy Bonifacy Zielonka – sugerowało na marginesach swoich prac, że groby atypowe mogą być grobami skazańców, to dopiero niedawno interpretacje te zostały potraktowane poważniej w związku z dynamicznie rozwijającym się nurtem tzw. „archeologii prawa".

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[5] Stanaszek 1998; 1999; 2000.

[6] Wrzesiński 2000c; 2008b.

[7] Żydok 2004.

[8] Porzeziński 2008.

[9] Wyrwa 2008.

Ważną rolę w tych przemianach zaczęło odgrywać czasopismo *Pomniki Dawnego Prawa*, wydawane przez badaczy należących do Stowarzyszenia Badań i Ochrony Zabytków Prawa. Zawarte w nim artykuły dotyczą różnych aspektów dawnej jurysdykcji zarówno w Polsce jak i za granicą, a niejednokrotnie publikowane są tam też raporty i specjalistyczne analizy z badań średniowiecznych oraz nowożytnych miejsc straceń. Systematyczne rozpoznanie tego typu stanowisk oraz pochodzących z nich znalezisk, a także umieszczenie ich w kontekście źródeł archiwalnych, porównawczych i nierzadko etnograficznych, pozwoliło na głębsze zrozumienie wieloznaczności atypowych praktyk pogrzebowych oraz stopniowe odżegnanie się od postrzegania ich tylko i wyłącznie jako wyraz obaw przed żywymi trupami.

Istotną rolę w badaniach nad pochówkami atypowymi odgrywają obecnie badania Daniela Wojtuckiego, a przede wszystkim jego obszerna książka pt. *Publiczne miejsca straceń na Dolnym Śląsku od XV do połowy XIX wieku*, gdzie również rozpatrywane są one nie tylko w świetle przekazów o wierze w żywe trupy, ale przede wszystkim jako przejawy praktyk dokonywanych na złoczyńcach i skazańcach[10].

Przełomowym wydarzeniem było także wydanie książki Pawła Dumy zatytułowanej *Grób alienata. Pochówki dzieci nieochrzczonych, samobójców i skazańców w późnym średniowieczu i dobie wczesnonowożytnej*[11]. Monografia ta oparta jest na pracy magisterskiej autora i podejmuje problem atypowych zabiegów pogrzebowych w okresie od XIV wieku. Znamienne jest to, że jakkolwiek Duma dostrzega możliwość by niektóre z grobów atypowych sygnalizowały obawy przed żywymi trupami, to przede wszystkim akcentuje on ich związek z dawnym wymiarem sprawiedliwości. Kontynuacją tych istotnych rozważań jest wydana w 2015 r. druga książka Pawła Dumy pt. *Śmierć nieczysta na Śląsku. Studia nad obrządkiem pogrzebowym społeczeństwa przedindustrialnego*[12]. Zgodnie z tytułem praca ta skupia się przede wszystkim na obszarze Śląska i omawiane są w niej zarówno miejsca straceń jak i różne formy grobów wykazujących cechy nietypowe. Jest to praca wysoce interdyscyplinarna, w umiejętny sposób łącząca materiały archeologiczne ze źródłami archiwalnymi i etnograficznymi. Co znamienne także dla rozważań podjętych w niniejszej monografii, Duma w przekonujący sposób pokazał, że określenie „wampir" było nieznane na Śląsku aż do dziewiętnastego wieku i że zamiast niego lokalna ludność stosowała szereg innych terminów w odniesieniu do żywych trupów - np. *Neuntöter, Nachzehrer* czy *Wiedergänger.*

Wartym podkreślenia jest fakt, że w ciągu ostatnich lat zorganizowano szereg konferencji skupiających się wokół problematyki związanej z pochówkami atypowymi. Oprócz wspominanych wcześniej Funeraliów Lednickich - gdzie pochówki atypowe omawiane były przy różnych okazjach - w Muzeum Zachodniokaszubskim w Bytowie organizowany jest też cykl Międzynarodowych Spotkań Interdyscyplinarnych „Motywy Przez Wieki". Dotychczas ukazały się dwa obszerne tomy zawierające studia dotyczące motywu głowy w dawnych kulturach oraz fenomenu otwierania grobów i wtórnego wykorzystywania ludzkich kończyn lub kości (np. u Celtów, Słowian, Skandynawów, Prusów i Anglosasów)[13]. Kolejne ważne głosy w dyskusji nad problemem pochówków atypowych - nie tylko tych z doby średniowiecza - opublikowane zostały w zbiorowej pracy pt. *Wymiary inności. Nietypowe zjawiska w obrzędowości pogrzebowej od pradziejów po czasy nowożytne* pod redakcją Kaliny Skóry i Tomasza Kurasińskiego[14].

Niedawno wydano także szereg studiów antropologicznych wnikliwie analizujących ludzkie szczątki pochodzące z grobów atypowych. Szczególnie ważne w tym zakresie są obserwacje poczynione przez Magdalenę Domicelę Matczak[15]. W swoim artykule Matczak zauważyła, że jakkolwiek niektórzy ze zmarłych pochowanych w atypowy sposób na cmentarzysku w Kałdusie cierpieli na rozmaite choroby i dolegliwości, to nie były one tak uciążliwe i poważne jak te, które zarejestrowano na szczątkach osób pochowanych na tym samym cmentarzysku w normatywny sposób. Matczak podkreśla, że nienormatywne potraktowanie niektórych zmarłych w Kałdusie nie wynikało raczej z chorób, na które oni cierpieli i że mogły za tym stać odmienne motywacje.

Najnowszą publikacją dotyczącą problemu pochówków atypowych jest książka Łukasza Maurycego Stanaszka zatytułowana *Wampiry w średniowiecznej Polsce*[16]. Jest to z założenia praca popularno-naukowa, lecz mimo to posiada ona rozbudowany aparat przypisów, które odsyłają bardziej wnikliwego czytelnika do literatury fachowej. Książka Stanaszka jest zmienioną i poprawioną wersją jego pracy magisterskiej obronionej w 2000 roku. Jej szczególną zaletą jest podjęcie próby krytycznej weryfikacji bezwiednie przyjmowanych wcześniej interpretacji niektórych grobów atypowych, a także dokonanie bardziej wnikliwych analiz osteologicznych. Na podstawie tych analiz udało się stwierdzić, że niektórzy zmarli pochowani w sposób atypowy posiadali za życia cechy fizyczne, które mogły wyróżniać ich spośród reszty społeczności. Jedną ze słabych stron pracy Stanaszka jest fakt, że w odniesieniu do materiałów archeologicznych przedstawia ona stan badań na rok 2000 i nie uwzględniono w niej najnowszych – często lepiej opracowanych i opublikowanych – przykładów grobów atypowych. Wśród bardziej krytycznie nastawionych czytelników może pojawić się również zarzut o zbyt swobodny dobór źródeł pisanych wykorzystanych do interpretacji nienormatywnych zjawisk pogrzebowych z czasów o wiele od nich młodszych (np. interpretowanie grobów wczesnośredniowiecznych w świetle przekazów etnograficznych z XIX lub XX wieku). Z uwagi na popularnonaukowy i dość przekrojowy charakter tej publikacji, niektóre z tych uproszczeń oraz niedociągnięć metodologicznych można jednak autorowi wybaczyć, a przy tym podkreślić, że w podobnym stylu pisane były także popularnonaukowe książki o wampiryzmie wydawane za granicą. Pomimo rozmaitych zastrzeżeń o charakterze metodologicznym, należy zaznaczyć, że praca Stanaszka jest *de facto* pierwszą, oficjalnie opublikowaną (pomijając liczne prace magisterskie, które nigdy nie ukazały się drukiem) próbą ujęcia problemu wczesnośredniowiecznych pochówków atypowych z ziem polskich.

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[10] Wojtucki 2009.

[11] Duma 2010.

[12] Duma 2015.

[13] Gardeła, Kajkowski 2013b; 2015b.

[14] Skóra, Kurasiński 2010.

[15] Matczak 2014.

[16] Stanaszek 2016a; 2016b.

W ciągu ostatniej dekady szczególną aktywnością w badaniach nad pochówkami atypowymi wśród Słowian i Skandynawów wykazał się Leszek Gardeła[17]. Przed wydaniem niniejszej monografii, opublikował on szereg artykułów analizujących m.in. zjawisko grzebania zmarłych na brzuchu, przykrywania ich zwłok kamieniami, dekapitacji oraz fenomen otwierania grobów. Niniejsza książka stanowi podsumowanie tych studiów i ukazuje omawiane w nich praktyki w znacznie szerszej perspektywie.

Wizualizacje pochówków atypowych

Jednym z najnowszych trendów w archeologii wczesnego średniowiecza są próby rekonstruowania wyglądu dawnych grobów w momencie pogrzebu. Rekonstrukcje te zwykle powstają jako efekt bliskiej współpracy pomiędzy archeologami, antropologami i artystami. W niniejszej książce również przestawiono szereg rekonstrukcji, które wykonane zostały przez artystę Mirosława Kuźmę. Warto zauważyć, że spora część z nich nigdy wcześniej nie była publikowana i powstała specjalnie na potrzeby tej monografii.

Problemy terminologiczne i określenie „wampir"

Jak można zauważyć, termin „grób/pochówek antywampiryczny" jest nadal chętnie stosowany w archeologii polskiej w odniesieniu do atypowych praktyk pogrzebowych, których ślady rejestrowane na wczesnośredniowiecznych cmentarzyskach szkieletowych. Czasem próbuje się go zastąpić bardziej neutralnymi określeniami typu „pochówek/grób atypowy", ale jednak „wampiryczne" interpretacje nadal nie straciły na popularności. Niektórzy badacze (nie tylko z Polski) twierdzą, że termin „wampir" powinien być rozumiany jako pewne słowo klucz, zbiorczo określające różne rodzaje „żywych trupów". Problem tkwi jednak w tym, że określenie wampir pojawia się w odniesieniu do ziem polskich dopiero w XVII wieku i nie jest ono poświadczone w żadnych źródłach wcześniejszych.

Chcąc wyjaśnić różne zawiłości i kontrowersje terminologiczne, w tej sekcji Rozdziału 3 omówiono etymologię słowa „wampir". W efekcie doprowadziło to do konkluzji, że stosowanie go do opisywania i interpretowania atypowych grobów z okresu wczesnego średniowiecza z ziem polskich jest poważnym nadużyciem. Jakkolwiek nie można wykluczyć, że wczesnośredniowieczni Słowianie znali koncepcję żywego trupa, to nie mamy żadnych źródeł pisanych, które zawierałyby informacje na temat tego jakimi nazwami (jeżeli jakimikolwiek) określali oni tego rodzaju istoty. W związku z powyższym podjęto decyzję o nieużywaniu określenia „grób/pochówek antywampiryczny". Zamiast niego w tej monografii stosowane są bardziej neutralne terminy „grób/pochówek atypowy" (ang. *atypical grave/burial*) oraz „pochówek nienormatywny" (ang. *non-normative grave/burial*).

W stronę syntezy pochówków atypowych w Polsce wczesnośredniowiecznej

Po przedstawieniu uwag wstępnych na temat świata Słowian we wczesnym średniowieczu (Rozdział 1), zarysowaniu różnych form i znaczeń praktyk pogrzebowych na ziemiach polskich w tym okresie (Rozdział 2), a także krytycznej analizie historii badań nad pochówkami atypowymi (Rozdział 3) możliwe jest podjęcie szczegółowych rozważań nad czterema z ich najbardziej dystynktywnych wariantów. W kolejnych rozdziałach tej książki przeanalizowane są więc pochówki na brzuchu (Rozdział 4), groby ze śladami dekapitacji (Rozdział 5), groby z kamieniami spoczywającymi bezpośrednio na ludzkich szczątkach (Rozdział 6) oraz różne przykłady grobów, które zostały otwarte oraz poddane rozmaitym popogrzebowym manipulacjom (Rozdział 7). Każdy rozdział, oprócz omówienia materiałów archeologicznych z ziem polskich, zawiera także podrozdziały porównawcze, gdzie przedstawione są analogiczne przykłady z terenów Skandynawii i tzw. wikińskiej diaspory oraz anglosaskiej Anglii. Dyskusję wzbogacają również analizy adekwatnych, średniowiecznych źródeł pisanych. Ponadto, tam gdzie było to możliwe i zasadne, zawarto również uwagi na temat atypowych zabiegów funeralnych w okresie późnego średniowiecza oraz przekazy na ich temat zarejestrowane w źródłach etnograficznych.

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[17] Gardeła 2009; 2010b; 2011a; 2011b; 2012a; 2012b; 2012c; 2013a; 2013b; 2013c; 2015a; 2015b; 2016c; in press a; in press d; in press e.

Rozdział 4: Twarzą do ziemi. Pochówki na brzuchu w Polsce wczesnośredniowiecznej

W Rozdziale 4 skupiono się na szczegółowej analizie fenomenu pochówków na brzuchu we wczesnośredniowiecznej Polsce. W obecnej chwili znanych jest trzydzieści przypadków tego typu grobów. Pomiędzy tymi grobami zaobserwować można sporo podobieństw, ale wykazują one również pewne różnice. Najczęściej grzebano w ten sposób mężczyzn, lecz znaleziono również przynajmniej cztery przypadki kobiecych grobów tego rodzaju. Zmarli pochowani na brzuchu zwykle mieli w momencie śmierci około 25–35 lat, choć znanych jest kilka przykładów osób w starszym wieku. Jak dotąd znaleziono tylko jeden grób, w którym na brzuchu pochowane zostało dziecko (10–12 lat) – odkryty on został na cmentarzysku w Wawrzeńczycach.

Na podstawie analizy dostępnych źródeł udało się ustalić, że praktyka grzebania zmarłych na brzuchu była najbardziej popularna na terenie Pomorza Zachodniego, a także na Kujawach i w Wielkopolsce. W innych częściach ziem polskich stosowano ten zabieg bardzo sporadycznie.

Wyjątkowe nagromadzenie grobów, w których zmarli pochowani zostali na brzuchu na terenie Wielkopolski i Kujaw tłumaczone być może w świetle dynamicznie rozwijającego się tam systemu prawa. Nie jest wykluczone, że praktyka grzebania na brzuchu miała stanowić formę kary dla przestępców, zaś jej egzekwowanie było dodatkową manifestacją coraz silniej działającego aparatu władzy w monarchii pierwszych Piastów. Idea ta – choć oczywiście pozostająca w sferze hipotez – dość dobrze koresponduje z chronologią najwcześniejszych przykładów grobów, w których zmarli pochowani zostali na brzuchu, czyli z wiekiem XI.

Przestrzenne rozmieszczenie w obrębie cmentarzysk

Groby osób pochowanych na brzuchu znajdowane są zarówno na cmentarzyskach pozakościelnych jak i przykościelnych. Należy odnotować, że w kilku przypadkach były one ulokowane w częściach liminalnych tych cmentarzysk (np. groby 49, 92 oraz 110 z Lubienia; groby 285 oraz 292 z Poznania Śródki; grób 90 z Sandomierza).

Przedmioty towarzyszące zmarłym

W grobach omawianego typu rzadko znajdowane jest wyposażenie. Warto jednak zauważyć, że w paru przypadkach odkryto żelazne noże i inne drobne przedmioty. W kobiecym grobie z Gwiazdowa znaleziono trzy kabłączki skroniowe, żelazny nóż w dekorowanej pochewce z brązu, brązowy pierścień oraz jeszcze jeden pierścień lub kółko o nieznanym przeznaczeniu. Grób ze Świelubia zawierał natomiast niezidentyfikowane fragmenty żelaza, a jeden z grobów z Wolina Młynówki kawałek glinianego naczynia.

Groby z pochówkami na brzuchu a inne atypowe praktyki pogrzebowe

W grobach z pochówkami na brzuchu rzadko rejestruje się inne atypowe praktyki pogrzebowe. Niemniej jednak w kilku przypadkach możliwe jest dopatrywanie się śladów dekapitacji (Cedynia 76; Kałdus 24/57; 26; Wolin Młynówka 15(29)). Nie jest też wykluczone, że niektóre osoby pochowane zostały ze związanymi kończynami dolnymi lub ewentualnie w całunach (np. Cedynia 76; Ciepłe 12/2005; Gruczno 502; Poznań Śródka 292; Niemcza 96; Wawrzeńczyce 157; Wolin Młynówka 189(349). Powodów krępowania kończyn może być wiele. Niewykluczone, że ślady te są pośrednim dowodem na to, że osoby te zostały powieszone (być może nawet za nogi oraz głową w dół) i/lub że związano je przed dokonaniem aktu egzekucji. Taką możliwość poświadczają źródła pisane oraz materiały porównawcze, na przykład z terenów Niemiec, Austrii i Anglii. Przekazy nowożytne wspominają też o praktyce związywania osób podejrzanych o szkodliwą, pośmiertną aktywność.

Pochówki żywcem

Nie można wykluczyć, że grób 110 ze Starego Zamku należy do kobiety, która pochowana została żywcem. Układ jej szczątków, a także zarejestrowane w grobie ślady po kołkach, mogą świadczyć o tym, że kobieta do ostatniego tchu walczyła o życie i starała się wyjść z jamy, do której ją wrzucono. Przyjmując ten wariant wydarzeń, odkryte w tym grobie ślady po „kołkach" mogą być interpretowane raczej jako pozostałości po kijach, za pomocą których przytrzymywano ją podczas zasypywania jamy. W tym kontekście warto zauważyć, że z okolic Świdnicy na Dolnym Śląsku (*nota bene* niedaleko Starego Zamku) znany jest przekaz z XVII wieku mówiący o karze śmierci na jaką skazana została kobieta, która dopuściła się zabójstwa własnych dzieci. Pochowano ją żywcem i dodatkowo przebito palem. Grób 110 ze Starego Zamku jest jedynym przykładem z ziem polskich, gdzie osobę pochowaną na brzuchu można z dużą dozą prawdopodobieństwa interpretować jako pochowaną żywcem.

Interpretacje grobów z pochówkami na brzuchu

Chociaż groby osób pochowanych na brzuchu w większości dotychczasowych studiów interpretowane były jako należące do „wampirów" lub jednostek, których pośmiertnej aktywności się obawiano, istnieje znacznie więcej sposobów na odczytywanie ich znaczeń, szczególnie jeśli spojrzymy na nie w perspektywie międzykulturowej oraz w kontekście źródeł pisanych. Pochówek na brzuchu mógł być związany z obawą przed tak zwanym „złym okiem", czyli spojrzeniem umierającej lub umarłej już osoby, które mogło przynieść nieszczęście lub nawet śmierć. Ponadto praktyka grzebania zmarłych na brzuchu mogła być też związana z obawą, że „coś" może wyjść lub wejść w ciało po śmierci (np. przez usta). Grzebanie na brzuchu mogło wreszcie sygnalizować akt pośmiertnej pokuty lub szczególnego oddania Bogu i nawiązywać do praktyki leżenia krzyżem. W niektórych przypadkach nie jest wykluczone, że układ ciała na brzuchu należy wiązać z pogrzebaniem danej osoby żywcem. Być może czasem tego typu praktyki stosowane były wobec osób obcych i pochodzących spoza danej społeczności, która dokonywała aktu pogrzebu.

Pochówek na brzuchu w polskich źródłach etnograficznych

Praktyka układania zmarłych w pozycji na brzuchu wzmiankowana jest w szeregu polskich przekazów etnograficznych zarejestrowanych m.in. przez takich badaczy jak Adam Fischer, Bonifacy Zielonka, Oskar Kolberg, Wojciech Łysiak czy Łukasz Maurycy Stanaszek. W większości z tych przekazów jest to zabieg o negatywnych konotacjach i stosowany przeciwko osobom, których pośmiertnej aktywności się obawiano. Należy jednak podkreślić, że akt ułożenia zwłok na brzuchu najczęściej następuje nie w trakcie samego pogrzebu, lecz dopiero po wtórnym otwarciu grobu. W związku z tym trudno jest łączyć wczesnośredniowieczne groby, w których zmarli spoczywają na brzuchu, z materiałami etnograficznymi – żaden z nich bowiem nie nosi jakichkolwiek śladów wtórnego otwierania i popogrzebowej manipulacji zwłok czy ich szczątków.

Perspektywy porównawcze

W tej sekcji rozdziału omówiono przykłady pochówków na brzuchu w różnych kontekstach kulturowych, zwracając szczególną uwagę na studia szwedzkiej badaczki Caroline Arcini, która przeanalizowała je w bardzo szerokiej perspektywie czasowej i geograficznej[18]. Na podstawie analizy pokaźnej bazy źródłowej doszła ona do szeregu istotnych wniosków. Najważniejsze z nich to obserwacje, że zarówno mężczyźni, kobiety jak i dzieci mogły być chowane w pozycji na brzuchu; większość grobów tego typu to groby pojedyncze, choć zdarzają się też wyjątkowo groby podwójne lub masowe; groby tego typu zwykle są dość płytkie i najczęściej nie zawierają żadnego wyposażenia; groby tego typu często są odizolowane od innych na danym cmentarzysku. Zdaniem Arcini, wśród osób pochowanych w pozycji na brzuchu mogli być: przestępcy i więźniowie; osoby, które poprzez ten akt chciały odpokutować za winy swoich rodziców (por. Pepin Krótki) albo osoby niemoralne; osoby, które pochowane zostały w sposób niedbały; samobójcy; osoby, które umarły poza domem i/lub we śnie; osoby ranne; osoby pochowane żywcem; osoby o domniemanych cechach nadnaturalnych; osoby o niskim statusie społecznym.

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[18] Arcini 2009.

Pochówki na brzuchu w wikińskiej Skandynawii

Praktyka grzebania zmarłych w pozycji na brzuchu jest stosunkowo rzadko obserwowana na terenie Skandynawii. W niniejszej sekcji omówiono szereg najbardziej reprezentatywnych grobów tego typu znalezionych na cmentarzyskach w Danii (m.in. Lejre grób 55, Bogøvej grób P) oraz zwrócono uwagę na rezultaty najnowszych badań Matthiasa Toplaka poświęconych pochówkom na brzuchu z cmentarzyska w Kopparsvik na Gotlandii[19]. Zdaniem Toplaka, na cmentarzysku w Koppararsvik praktykę tę stosowano nie wobec zmarłych, których pośmiertnej aktywności się obawiano lecz wobec wyjątkowo pobożnych chrześcijan – świadczy o tym wyjątkowo duża ilość tego typu grobów, ich bogate wyposażenie oraz ulokowanie wzdłuż dawnej linii brzegowej, czyli w miejscu, które w świetle przekazów pisanych byłoby stosowne także dla osób, które zostały naznaczone krzyżem (*prima signatio*), ale przed śmiercią nie zdążyły dostąpić sakramentu chrztu.

Pochówki na brzuchu w anglosaskiej Anglii

Przypadki, w których zmarli spoczywają w pozycji na brzuchu, stanowią dość duży procent wszystkich grobów atypowych znalezionych na terenie anglosaskiej Anglii. W ten sposób traktowano zarówno mężczyzn jak i kobiety. Czasem w grobach z okresu „pogańskiego" znajdowano wyposażenie takie jak brosze, paciorki, sprzączki do pasów czy naczynia, a mężczyznom okazjonalnie towarzyszyła broń w postaci włóczni i umb tarcz. Groby kobiece tego typu – nieraz z dość specyficznym wyposażeniem – interpretowane są nierzadko jako należące do tak zwanych *cunning women*, czyli kobiet, które mogły parać się magią.

W anglosaskiej Anglii groby zmarłych pochowanych na brzuchu rzadko wykazują ślady dodatkowych zabiegów atypowych, choć w kilku przypadkach odnotowano możliwość związania nóg, dekapitacji lub amputacji kończyn. Kilka osób pochowanych w ten sposób dodatkowo przykryto kamieniami.

Po przyjęciu chrześcijaństwa nie przestano grzebać zmarłych w pozycji na brzuchu. Zdaniem Andrew Reynoldsa praktyki te miały jednak zawsze negatywne konotacje[20]. Najczęściej traktowano w ten sposób mężczyzn, ale znanych jest kilka przypadków grzebania na brzuchu kobiet. W świecie anglosaskim groby osób ułożonych na brzuchu zazwyczaj interpretowane są jako należące do skazańców bądź osób zaangażowanych w działania magiczne o negatywnym charakterze. Fakt znajdowania wielu tego typu grobów na cmentarzyskach towarzyszących miejscom straceń dodatkowo podkreśla, że raczej nie były to groby katechumenów, tak jak w przypadku znalezisk z Kopparsvik na Gotlandii.

Konkluzje

W porównaniu z innymi kategoriami wczesnośredniowiecznych pochówków atypowych z ziem polskich przykłady grzebania zmarłych w pozycji na brzuchu stanowią dość liczną grupę. Synteza wszystkich znanych przypadków tego typu grobów pozwoliła na ustalenie, że najczęściej traktowano w ten sposób mężczyzn, choć znane są sporadyczne przypadki grzebania na brzuchu kobiet i jeden przypadek potraktowania w ten sposób dziecka. Jak wspomniano, większość grobów tego rodzaju odkryta została na terenie Wielkopolski, Kujaw oraz Pomorza, co może mieć związek z rozwijającym się na tych terenach systemem prawa i kar. Jakkolwiek niezwykle trudno jest stwierdzić, kim dokładnie były osoby pochowane w pozycji na brzuchu i dlaczego w ten sposób je potraktowano, to prawdopodobnych jest kilka wariantów interpretacyjnych. Mogą to być groby skazańców (także takich, którzy zostali powieszeni – co sugerują związane kończyny) lub samobójców, bądź osób uważanych za odmieńców. W świetle materiałów porównawczych nie można też wykluczyć, że niektóre z tych grobów należą do osób wyjątkowo pobożnych, a akt złożenia ich ciał na brzuchu jest gestem oddania Bogu lub formą pokuty. Jest też możliwe, że niektóre z grobów tego typu należały do osób, których pośmiertnej aktywności się obawiano – biorąc jednak pod uwagę wieloznaczność pochówków na brzuchu, trudno jest to stwierdzić z pewnością. Należy też pamiętać, że choć przekazy etnograficzne wspominają o chowaniu zmarłych twarzą do ziemi – nigdy nie jest to dokonywane w chwili pierwotnego pogrzebu, a dopiero po jakimś czasie i po wtórnym otwarciu grobu osoby podejrzanej o szkodliwą, pośmiertną działalność. Jak dotąd w żadnym z grobów wczesnośredniowiecznych z ziem polskich, w których zmarli spoczywają na brzuchu nie zarejestrowano śladów wtórnego otwierania.

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[19] Toplak 2015.

[20] Reynolds 2009.

Rozdział 5: Bez głowy. Dekapitacja w Polsce wczesnośredniowiecznej

Motyw głowy odkrywał istotną rolę w różnych dawnych kulturach, a na przestrzeni dziejów praktyce dekapitacji przypisywano wielorakie znaczenia. W tym rozdziale szczególną uwagę poświęcono takim rodzajom wczesnośredniowiecznych grobów szkieletowych z ziem polskich, w których głowa/czaszka celowo oddzielona została od reszty ciała/szkieletu.

Ślady dekapitacji znaleziono w ponad dwudziestu wczesnośredniowiecznych grobach z ziem polskich datowanych pomiędzy X–XIII wiekiem. Znane są także przykłady o młodszej chronologii, które poświadczają, że praktyka ta była kontynuowana w czasach późniejszych. Najwięcej przypadków tego typu grobów zarejestrowano na terenie Pomorza, Wielkopolski, Kujaw oraz Śląska, z kilkoma przykładami w innych częściach kraju. Zasadniczym problemem, który pojawia się podczas podejmowania ich analiz i interpretacji, jest fakt, że wiele z nich odkrytych zostało w latach sześćdziesiątych i siedemdziesiątych, zaś forma ich opracowania często pozostawia wiele do życzenia. Ponieważ znaczna część szczątków kostnych z omawianych w tym rozdziale grobów nie została poddana nowym analizom osteologicznym i zawierzono danym opublikowanym przed niemal półwieczem, nie można wykluczyć, że część przedstawionych tu poglądów będzie wymagała weryfikacji w przyszłości.

We wprowadzeniu do omawianego rozdziału szereg uwag poświęcono kwestiom metodologicznym związanym z poprawną identyfikacją grobów osób poddanych dekapitacji. Zauważono przy tym, że czaszka mogła oddzielić się od szkieletu postkranialnego na skutek rozmaitych procesów tafonomicznych i podepozycyjnych – szczególnie jeśli zmarła osoba pochowana była w trumnie lub w grobie komorowym (czyli generalnie w grobach z „pustą przestrzenią" umożliwiającą przemieszczanie kości i wyposażenia na skutek różnych naturalnych procesów), a także w takich przypadkach, gdy do zwłok miały dostęp zwierzęta. Generalnie najbardziej przekonywującym dowodem na intencjonalną dekapitację są ślady cięć na materiale kostnym (np. na kręgach szyjnych lub czaszce). Na chwilę obecną takie ślady udało się zidentyfikować tylko w nielicznych wczesnośredniowiecznych grobach znalezionych na ziemiach polskich (np. Kałdus, Stary Brześć Kujawski).

Statystycznie najwięcej przypadków domniemanych grobów ze śladami dekapitacji zarejestrowano na stanowisku 2 oraz 2a w Cedyni. Ich uważna analiza pozwoliła na wyszczególnienie kilku wariantów tej praktyki: 1. głowa/czaszka jest oddzielona od szkieletu postkranialnego i złożona twarzą do ziemi, 2. głowa/czaszka jest oddzielona od szkieletu i nie ma jej w grobie, 3. głowa/czaszka jest oddzielona od szkieletu i zastąpiona kamieniem (przy jednoczesnym braku głowy/czaszki w grobie), 4. głowa/czaszka jest oddzielona od szkieletu i umieszczona przy stopach. Po dalszej weryfikacji tych grobów, udało się wyróżnić te, co do których wątpliwości są najmniejsze: 76, 186, 196, 841 oraz być może 215, 552, 789, 888 i 910.

Kolejne groby omawianej kategorii odkryte zostały na wczesnośredniowiecznych cmentarzyskach w Kałdusie (stan. 1 oraz 4). W przypadku grobu 256/01 zarejestrowano ślady cięcia na zachowanych częściach szkieletów, które są bardzo przekonywującym sygnałem, że rzeczywiście dokonano tam intencjonalnego aktu oddzielenia głów. Ślady cięć odkryte zostały także w przypadku grobu 446 ze Starego Brześcia Kujawskiego. Dalsze przykłady (choć bez wyraźnych śladów cięć na szczątkach kostnych i nie zawsze jednoznaczne) pochodzą z Milicza (grób 229), Niemczy (groby 62 oraz 66), Płocka-Podolszyc (grób 30/84), Samborca, Sandomierza (groby 10, 26 oraz 101), Sowinek (grób 404), a także z Wolina Młynówki i Wzgórza Wisielców w Wolinie.

Przestrzenne rozmieszczenie w obrębie cmentarzysk

Podobnie jak w przypadku pochówków na brzuchu, większość grobów ze śladami dekapitacji odkrytych zostało na cmentarzyskach pozakościelnych. Wyjątkowo rzadko groby te ulokowane są na granicach cmentarzysk i tylko w paru przypadkach odnotowano próby ich przestrzennego odizolowania (np. grób 256/01 z Kałdusa, grób 4 z Samborca oraz grób 404 z Sowinek).

Przedmioty towarzyszące zmarłym

Groby ze śladami dekapitacji zwykle pozbawione są wyposażenia, choć w kilku z nich odkryto różnego typu przedmioty. Należą do nich grób 60 (z pierścieniem z brązu) oraz 215 (z kabłączkiem skroniowym) z Cedyni, a także grób 552 z tego samego stanowiska gdzie znaleziono pas z brązową sprzączką i okuciami. Wyposażenie znaleziono także w grobie 4 z Samborca (żelazny nóż) oraz grobie 10 z Sandomierza (żelazny nóż). W grobie 404 z Sowinek znaleziono węgle drzewne i niewielki kamień – nie jest jednak jasne czy należy uznawać je za wyposażenie.

Groby ze śladami dekapitacji a inne atypowe praktyki pogrzebowe

W grobach omawianej kategorii rzadko spotyka się ślady dodatkowych zabiegów atypowych. Jak wspomniano powyżej, w przypadku Cedyni w szeregu grobów zarejestrowano kamienie, które zastępowały brakujące głowy/czaszki. Ponadto układ nóg osobnika pochowanego w grobie 841 w Cedyni sugeruje, że mogły być one związane, lub że osoba ta owinięta była w całun. Mężczyzna z grobu 15(29) z Wolina Młynówki miał nogi założone jedna na drugą i klatką piersiową zwrócony był ku ziemi – taki układ sugeruje, że został on skrępowany. Kolejnym przykładem, gdzie dekapitacja współwystępuje z pochówkiem na brzuchu, jest grób 24/57 z Kałdusa. W dyskusji zwrócono też uwagę, że w przypadku kilku grobów ze śladami dekapitacji, odcięta głowa ułożona została twarzą do ziemi (grób 186 z Cedyni, grób 229 z Milicza, grób 66 z Niemczy, grób 15(29) z Wolina) – być może z obawy przed tak zwanym „złym okiem".

Pochówki czaszek?

Jednym z najciekawszych fenomenów związanych z praktykami funeralnymi wczesnośredniowiecznych Słowian są tak zwane „pochówki czaszek", czyli przypadki, gdy w jamie spoczywa bez szkieletu postkranialnego jedna lub więcej czaszek. W tej części omawianego rozdziału starano się krytycznie przeanalizować wszystkie znane przypadki tego typu pochówków/depozytów z ziem polskich. Zwrócono przy tym uwagę, że jakkolwiek mogą one reprezentować intencjonalne akty rytualne, to nie jest wykluczone, że część z nich tylko pozornie sprawia wrażenie „pochówków czaszek", w rzeczywistości będąc po prostu naruszonymi lub niekompletnie zachowanymi grobami. Należy ponadto podkreślić, że zdecydowanej większości odkryć tak zwanych „pochówków czaszek" dokonano przed wieloma laty, a sposób ich opublikowania znacząco odbiega od dzisiejszych standardów (w wielu przypadkach brakuje planów lub zdjęć tych grobów i znane są one tylko z dość lakonicznych opisów) – wszystko to zmusza do ostrożności w podejmowanych próbach interpretacji.

Zasadniczo tak zwane „pochówki czaszek" podzielić można na trzy warianty: 1. pochówki pojedynczych czaszek bez szkieletów postkranialnych, 2. groby zawierające kompletne szkielety ludzkie z dodatkową czaszką innego osobnika, 3. groby lub depozyty zawierające jedną lub więcej czaszek w jednej jamie. Każdy z tych wymienionych wariantów omówiony został w osobnej sekcji. Dwie pierwsze kategorie budzą dużo wątpliwości, a ujęte w ich ramach przykłady w większości pochodzą z dawnych wykopalisk, których wyniki zostały niestety lakonicznie lub wybiórczo opracowane, co prowadzi do wielu trudności interpretacyjnych. Najbardziej wymowne są przypadki, gdy w jednej jamie znajduje się kilka czaszek bez śladów szkieletów postkranialnych – tego typu odkrycia są bardzo silnym sygnałem, że mamy do czynienia z intencjonalnym depozytem, a nie specyficznym efektem procesów tafonomicznych czy podepozycyjnych. Dwa przykłady tego typu grobów (grób 12/59 oraz grób 13/59) zostały znalezione na cmentarzysku wczesnośredniowiecznym w Gieczu.

Interpretacje tak zwanych „pochówków czaszek" przysparzają badaczom sporo problemów. W literaturze naukowej były one postrzegane jako należące do osób, które poległy w boju i których głowy zostały odcięte. Sugerowano również, że są to przykłady tak zwanych „pochówków cząstkowych", gdzie do grobu złożona jest tylko wybrana część szkieletu. Mogło się tak wydarzyć, gdy niemożliwe było przeniesienie z jednego miejsca na drugie całego ciała (np. gdy dana osoba poniosła śmierć daleko od domu, a chciano pochować ją w rodzinnych stronach). Nie można też wykluczyć, że groby/depozyty zawierające same czaszki reprezentują trofea lub że jest to specyficzna forma grzebania części ciał skazańców (np. czaszki uprzednio wyeksponowane na cmentarzysku, które zostały po jakimś czasie zebrane i wrzucone do jednej jamy). W pracy Magdaleny Felis[21] pojawiła się też sugestia, że tego typu pochówki są przejawem praktyk związanych z kultem zmarłych – jest to niewątpliwie ciekawa teza, ale niestety nie ma żadnych średniowiecznych źródeł pisanych, które mogły by ją podeprzeć i potwierdzić istnienie takich wierzeń na terenie Polski. Możliwe jest także, że tak zwane „pochówki czaszek" należy wiązać z jakimś innymi – niezrozumiałymi dziś dla nas – oraz bardzo specyficznymi praktykami rytualnymi.

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[21] Felis 2007.

Interpretowanie grobów ze śladami dekapitacji

Kolejna część Rozdziału 5 przedstawia różne możliwości interpretowania wczesnośredniowiecznych grobów ze śladami dekapitacji datowanych od późnego X do XIII w. W dyskusji czerpano ze źródeł pisanych oraz, w uzasadnionych przypadkach, sięgano do materiałów o późniejszej chronologii.

Przykłady dekapitacji zarejestrowane w średniowiecznych źródłach pisanych odnoszących się do ziem polskich wskazują, że była to najczęściej honorowa kara śmierci. Takie jej postrzeganie poświadcza na przykład fragment kroniki Galla Anonima, gdzie mowa o poganach, którzy w akcie rewolty przeciwko duchownym zabijali ich swymi mieczami (co sugeruje dekapitację), a tych, którzy byli mniej godni, obrzucali kamieniami. Sądząc po ilości rozmaitych terminów łacińskich, jakie stosowane są w źródłach pisanych na określenie dekapitacji, można przypuszczać, że była to najpopularniejsza kara śmierci w okresie wczesnego średniowiecza. Niemniej jednak jest równie możliwe, że wielość nazw pod jakimi określano dekapitację wynika jedynie z odmiennego stylu pisarskiego różnych średniowiecznych autorów. Zdaniem Henryka Grajewskiego, autora ważnej pracy zatytułowanej *Kara śmierci w prawie polskim do połowy XIV wieku*, na karę śmierci przez dekapitację najczęściej skazywano złodziei[22]. Co ciekawe, ze źródeł pisanych wynika, że dekapitację jako karę za kradzież stosowano zazwyczaj wobec osób należących do stanu rycerskiego. Jeśli kradzieży dokonała osoba niższego stanu, karą było powieszenie (choć istniały od tego wyjątki).

Oprócz źródeł pisanych dotyczących ziem polskich w dalszych częściach omawianego rozdziału przeanalizowano także przykłady dekapitacji z terenów Pomorza i Połabia. W tamtejszych realiach dekapitacja była często karą wymierzaną przez pogan na chrześcijanach – szczególnie (choć nie tylko) duchownych, którzy rozmaitymi sposobami starali się głosić nową wiarę, nierzadko łamiąc przy tym pogańskie tabu i naruszając miejsca uznawane przez pogan za święte. Czasem dokonywano też dekapitacji na pojmanych wrogach, zaś późniejsze eksponowanie ich głów miało pełnić rolę dydaktyczną i służyć jako przestroga. Godny podkreślenia jest tutaj fakt, że w żadnych dostępnych dziś średniowiecznych źródłach pisanych dotyczących wczesnośredniowiecznej Polski czy Pomorza nie ma mowy o tym, by aktu dekapitacji dokonywano z obawy przed żywymi trupami.

Dekapitacja w Polsce późnośredniowiecznej i wczesnonowożytnej

Po omówieniu motywu dekapitacji w źródłach pisanych, nieco uwagi poświęcono dalszemu rozwojowi tego typu praktyk w okresie późnego średniowiecza oraz w dobie wczesnonowożytnej. Podjęta tu dyskusja nie miała bynajmniej na celu wyczerpania tego tematu i służyła raczej jako szersze tło porównawcze.

Późnośredniowieczne groby ze szczątkami noszącymi ślady dekapitacji znajdowane są najczęściej w bezpośredniej okolicy miejsc straceń – zwykle przy szubienicach lub innych elementach architektury związanych z dawnym wymiarem sprawiedliwości. W ramach działań Stowarzyszenia Ochrony i Badań Zabytków Prawa w ostatnim czasie sporo takich miejsc na terenie Śląska zostało wnikliwie zbadanych pod kątem archeologicznym i historycznym (z wykorzystaniem rozmaitych źródeł archiwalnych).

W późnośredniowiecznych źródłach pisanych dekapitacja była karą za różne przestępstwa, takie jak na przykład: uprawianie magii, dzieciobójstwo, kradzież, rozwiązłość seksualna, czy domniemane kontakty z diabłem. Samego aktu odcięcia głowy dokonywano najczęściej za pomocą miecza. W trakcie egzekucji skazaniec mógł klęczeć lub siedzieć na krześle, stołku bądź klocu drewna. Zdarzało się czasem, że odciętą głowę skazańca przebijano długim gwoździem i przytwierdzano w ten sposób do słupów lub do elementów konstrukcyjnych szubienic. Na ziemiach polskich czaszkę przebitą gwoździem znaleziono m.in. w Piotrkowie i jakkolwiek czasem prezentowana jest ona jako ślad zabiegu zastosowanego przeciwko „wampirowi", to w rzeczywistości nie ma ona z tym nic wspólnego i wiąże się z dawnymi praktykami karnymi.

Jedne z najciekawszych odkryć grobów skazańców, którzy poddani zostali dekapitacji, pochodzą ze stanowiska w Miłkowie, które badane było przez Stowarzyszenie Ochrony i Badań Zabytków Prawa. Na podstawie zachowanych źródeł archiwalnych udało się zidentyfikować tożsamość pochowanych tam zmarłych jako rodzinę Exnerów, których egzekucja miała miejsce w 1701 r.[23] Przypadki kiedy z taką precyzją można zidentyfikować odkryte na stanowisku archeologicznym szczątki ludzkie są niezwykle rzadkie, ale pokazują też ogromny potencjał, jaki ma w sobie bliska współpraca pomiędzy archeologami, antropologami fizycznymi i historykami-archiwistami.

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[22] Grajewski 1956.

[23] Wojtucki 2009; Duma 2010; 2015.

Perspektywy porównawcze

Po dokonaniu szczegółowej analizy praktyki dekapitacji wśród wczesnośredniowiecznych Słowian z ziem polskich i Pomorza, dalsze części omawianego rozdziału dotyczą podobnych zabiegów w Skandynawii i anglosaskiej Anglii.

Dekapitacja w świecie wikingów

Ponieważ motyw odcinania głów pojawia się w szerokiej gamie staronordyckich źródeł pisanych, uznano za stosowne dokonanie przeglądu najważniejszych z nich. Z motywem tym mamy do czynienia w różnego typu przekazach – zarówno tych o charakterze mitologicznym (m.in. zawartych w *Eddzie Poetyckiej* oraz *Ynglinga saga* Snorriego Sturlusona) jak i w sagach rodowych, które z założenia dotyczyć mogą (choć nie koniecznie muszą) autentycznych postaci z czasów wikingów.

W przekazach mitologicznych pojawia się na przykład postać Mímira, wysłannika bogów, który na skutek niefortunnych okoliczności został pozbawiony głowy. Głowę Mímira przejął jednak bóg Odyn i używając swych nadnaturalnych zdolności udało mu się utrzymać ją przy życiu. W tej postaci Mímir miał służyć Odynowi swoją radą.

Motyw dekapitacji występuje też w szeregu przekazów dotyczących różnych nordyckich herosów. W źródłach tych akt odcięcia głowy często dokonywany jest w charakterze zemsty na wrogu bądź zdrajcy (np. *Fáfnismál*, *Vǫlundarkviða*).

Staronordyckie sagi natomiast pokazują odcięte głowy lub sam akt dekapitacji w bardzo różnych kontekstach. Na przykład w *Jómsvikinga saga* odcięta głowa pojawia się w śnie i jest zwiastunem tragicznych wydarzeń, które wkrótce mają nastąpić. Warto zwrócić szczególną uwagę na fakt, że w szeregu staronordyckich przekazów dekapitacja związana jest z zabiegami mającymi zatrzymać negatywne działanie żywych trupów. W szeregu sag mamy do czynienia z podobnym schematem działania: lokalna społeczność dręczona jest przez żywego trupa, po jakimś czasie pojawia się heros, który rozkopuje grób należący do podejrzanego o te działania człowieka i w wyniku zaciętego pojedynku odcina mu głowę. W kontekście materiałów etnograficznych z terenów Słowiańszczyzny warto zwrócić uwagę na przekaz zawarty w *Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar*, gdzie po pokonaniu żywego trupa, jego odcięta głowa umieszczona zostaje „pomiędzy pośladkami" (czyli z dala od szyi i w okolicach nóg). Po dokonaniu przeglądu różnych staronordyckich źródeł pisanych można wyciągnąć wniosek, że dekapitacja wiąże się zarówno z postaciami bogów, herosów jak i istot nadnaturalnych. Generalnie rzecz ujmując, poza sferą mitologiczną, źródła pisane ukazują praktykę odcinania głowy jako formę egzekucji dokonywanej na schwytanych więźniach lub jako sposób na pokonanie żywego trupa. Okazjonalnie spotyka się też motyw dekapitacji jako efekt zemsty, a w paru przypadkach pojawiają się odcięte głowy, które mają zdolność mówienia i służenia swoją radą.

Jakkolwiek motyw dekapitacji opisywany jest w dość licznych staronordyckich źródłach pisanych, to na podstawie badań archeologicznych można stwierdzić, że praktyka ta nie była podejmowana zbyt często na terenie Skandynawii. Przykłady grobów, w których pochowano zmarłych pozbawionych głów, znane są przede wszystkim z terenów Danii, ale także ze Szwecji i innych obszarów tak zwanej wikińskiej diaspory. Groby te mają różne warianty i na obszarze Danii często spoczywa w nich dwóch osobników, czasem ułożonych jeden nad drugim, a czasem obok siebie. Interesujący przypadek pierwszego typu został zarejestrowany m.in. w grobie 55 z Lejre, gdzie w głębokiej jamie pochowano nad sobą dwóch mężczyzn – mężczyzna leżący najniżej był ułożony na wznak, a ten którego pochowano ponad nim spoczywał w pozycji na brzuchu i miał związane kończyny oraz odciętą głowę. Groby tego typu zwykle interpretowane są jako należące do możnych i ich niewolników, których złożono w ofierze. Nie można jednak wykluczyć alternatywnej możliwości, że są to groby skazańców. W dalszych częściach tej sekcji dyskusji poddano inne przykłady grobów ze śladami dekapitacji z duńskich stanowisk w Stengade (grób FII), Kumle Høje (grób F) oraz Bogøvej (grób T), a także z szeregu cmentarzysk na terenie Szwecji (np. Birka, Fjälkinge oraz Ljungbacka). Na końcu omówiono też ciekawy przykład domniemanej próby dekapitacji z grobu z Ballateare z Wyspy Man oraz masowy pochówek z Ridgeway Hill w południowej Anglii. Ten ostatni jest ewidentnym śladem egzekucji, prawdopodobnie dokonanej przez Anglosasów na skandynawskich najeźdźcach – w jednej jamie znaleziono bowiem ponad pięćdziesiąt szkieletów mężczyzn pozbawionych czaszek.

Przegląd materiałów archeologicznych z różnych części wikińskiego świata pozwala na stwierdzenie, że akt dekapitacji najczęściej dokonywany był na dorosłych mężczyznach. Autorowi znane są jedynie dwa groby kobiece z terenów Skandynawii (grób Bj 959 z Birki oraz grób T z Bogøvej), w których znaleziono szczątki kobiet z oddzielonymi głowami – groby te są jednak dość niejednoznaczne i nie ma pewności czy mamy w ich przypadku do czynienia z intencjonalną dekapitacją czy może oddzielenie głowy nastąpiło na skutek procesów podepozycyjnych.

Jak podkreślano, groby osób pozbawionych głów mogą być zarówno pojedyncze jak i podwójne, ale znanych jest także kilka przypadków grobów masowych. Przyglądając się uważnie materiałom archeologicznym i źródłom pisanym można wysunąć konkluzję, że nie zawsze mają one jednakową wymowę – każdy z nich mógł wyrażać zupełnie inne treści i niekoniecznie mieć zawsze negatywne konotacje. Jakkolwiek groby podwójne, w których jeden ze zmarłych pozbawiony jest głowy, interpretowane są zwykle jako należące do możnych i ich niewolników, to należy zdać sobie sprawę z tego, że bezgłowy niewolnik raczej nie byłby przydatny w zaświatach. Ciągłym wyzwaniem jakie stoi przed badaczami jest znalezienie lepszej interpretacji tych nietypowych zjawisk pogrzebowych.

Dekapitacja w anglosaskiej Anglii

Podobnie jak w przypadku materiałów archeologicznych z wczesnośredniowiecznej Polski, spora część grobów ze śladami dekapitacji z terenów anglosaskiej Anglii trudna jest do zinterpretowania. Wynika to z faktu, że jakkolwiek niektóre groby sprawiają wrażenie jakby należały do osób pozbawionych głów, to nie zostało to potwierdzone szczegółowymi analizami antropologicznymi. W wielu przypadkach sposób dokumentacji również pozostawia wiele wątpliwości.

Z okresu pogańskiego Andrew Reynolds wyróżnił 54 możliwe przypadki dekapitacji, w większości rozmieszczone we wschodniej, środkowej i południowo-środkowej Anglii.[24] Ponad połowa z tych grobów pozbawiona była wyposażenia, a reszta wyposażona była bardzo skromnie. Na podstawie dokonanych analiz udało się ustalić, że w grobach tego typu spoczywali zarówno mężczyźni jak i kobiety, choć tych pierwszych było więcej. Wydaje się, że aktu oddzielenia głowy od reszty ciała najczęściej dokonywano za pomocą miecza.

Zdaniem Andrew Reynoldsa strach przed umarłymi mógł być podstawową motywacją do odcinania głów we wczesno-anglosaskiej Anglii, choć nie wyklucza on możliwości, by praktyka ta wiązała się z karami za dokonanie przestępstw. Mimo to, jego zdaniem, także wówczas zabieg ten byłby dodatkowo podbudowany chęcią zabezpieczenia się przed powstaniem zmarłego z grobu.

Po przyjęciu chrześcijaństwa praktyka dekapitacji nadal była kontynuowana na terenie Anglii, choć przypisywane jej wcześniej znaczenia mogły ulec pewnym modyfikacjom. Stało się tak również dlatego, że w tym okresie zaczęły pojawiać się specjalnie wydzielone miejsca egzekucji, gdzie grzebano zmarłych posądzonych o rozmaite przestępstwa. Reynolds zidentyfikował w sumie czternaście stanowisk, na których odkryto łącznie 99 możliwych przypadków dekapitacji. Większość osób tak potraktowanych to mężczyźni, ale zarejestrowano też 9 przypadków kobiet, które pozbawione zostały głów. Co ciekawe – i formalnie podobne do niektórych przypadków z ziem polskich – czasem odcięte głowy umieszczone były w grobach między udami, w okolicach nóg lub przy stopach, a także na klatce piersiowej lub na jednym z ramion.

Zdaniem Reynoldsa groby osób pochowanych z odciętymi głowami rzadko wykazywały inne cechy atypowe. Znane są jednak przypadki, gdzie zauważono praktykę wiązania rąk – najprawdopodobniej czyniono tak przed egzekucją, aby skazaniec nie był w stanie sparować śmiertelnego ciosu. Ponadto istnieją też pośrednie dowody na to, że niektóre z odciętych głów były publicznie eksponowane – świadczą o tym zachowane ślady na niektórych czaszkach, sugerujące ich wystawienie na różne warunki pogodowe. Stanowi to interesującą analogię do wcześniej omawianych przypadków z Cedyni i Wzgórza Wisielców w Wolinie, gdzie też, być może, eksponowano odcięte głowy na powierzchni cmentarzysk.

Podsumowując, można stwierdzić, że praktyka dekapitacji w anglosaskiej Anglii – w zależności od okresu dziejowego – miała różne znaczenia. Jakkolwiek dopuszczalne jest wiązanie jej z obawami przed żywymi trupami, to istotny jest też jej ścisły związek z wymiarem sprawiedliwości. Na podstawie anglosaskich przekazów pisanych oraz praw takich władców jak Edgar czy Æthelred wiemy, że była to kara za kradzież.

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[24] Reynolds 2009.

Konkluzje

Szczegółowy przegląd rozmaitych kategorii źródeł dotyczących dekapitacji wśród Słowian, Skandynawów i Anglosasów pokazał, że mniej więcej w tym samym okresie dziejowym – to znaczy pomiędzy późnym X a XIII wiekiem – praktykom tym przypisywano bogatą gamę znaczeń. Umieszczenie znalezisk archeologicznych z terenów wczesnośredniowiecznej Polski w kontekście porównawczym dowiodło, że ich wcześniejsze interpretacje łączące akt dekapitacji tylko z wiarą w tak zwane wampiry czy żywe trupy są znacznym uproszczeniem. W świetle materiałów omówionych w tym rozdziale, wiele wskazuje na to, że były to praktyki związane raczej z dawnym wymiarem sprawiedliwości, a aktu odcinania głowy dokonywano jako formy kary śmierci za różnego typu wykroczenia. Kierując się źródłami pisanymi, możemy przypuszczać, że w interesującym nas okresie w ten sposób wymierzano sprawiedliwość złodziejom, i że pomimo swego drastycznego wizualnie charakteru była to jednak śmierć, która uznawana była za bardziej honorową niż na przykład powieszenie. Zdaniem autora, skazańców można dopatrywać się w grobach z Cedyni, Wolina i Sowinek, ale także z Kałdusa i być może z Sandomierza. Interpretacje grobów z Niemczy, Milicza czy Płocka-Podolszyc nie są jednoznaczne, również ze względu na stan zachowania i charakter wcześniejszych opracowań materiałów archeologicznych. Ostatecznie autor podkreśla, że nie jest przekonany do postulowanych wcześniej „wampirycznych" interpretacji grobów ze śladami dekapitacji, choć nie wyklucza, że niektóre z grobów, w których zmarli mają odcięte głowy i gdzie zastosowano także inne zabiegi atypowe, mogły należeć do osób, których pośmiertnej aktywności się obawiano. Tak jak w przypadku innych grobów atypowych omawianych w niniejszej książce, również do grobów ze śladami dekapitacji należy podchodzić w możliwie jak najbardziej uważny i kompleksowy sposób, dostrzegając przy tym różne potencjalne ścieżki ich interpretacji.

Rozdział 6: Kamienowanie i pochówek pod kamieniami w Polsce wczesnośredniowiecznej

Kamienowanie jest bardzo brutalną formą egzekucji. Przekazy pisane, źródła etnograficzne, a nawet współczesne przykłady wskazują, że najczęściej kamienowanie dokonywane było przez grupę ludzi, którzy w ten sposób chcieli kolektywnie wymierzyć sprawiedliwość określonej jednostce.

Przyglądając się motywowi kamienowania w perspektywie międzykulturowej natychmiast jasne jest, że ma on bardzo archaiczną genezę. Akt ten był praktykowany m.in. przez starożytnych Greków, Rzymian, Macedończyków, Persów, a także ludność żydowską i Germanów. W okresie wczesnego średniowiecza kamienowanie znane było również wśród Słowian.

W pierwszych sekcjach Rozdziału 6 zarysowano szerokie tło porównawcze dla motywu kamienowania w świecie słowiańskim. Zauważono między innymi, że w świecie starożytnych Greków ten akt egzekucji miał konotacje rytualne i był sposobem na usunięcie „skażenia", kalającego społeczeństwo, którego członek dokonał jakiegoś wykroczenia. Takich konotacji nie zarejestrowano jednak w innych kulturach.

Celem tego rozdziału jest uważne przyjrzenie się praktyce kładzenia (lub rzucania) kamieni na zwłokach na wczesnośredniowiecznych cmentarzyskach z ziem polskich. W dotychczasowej literaturze przedmiotu tego rodzaju akty interpretowane były najczęściej jako chęć zabezpieczenia się przed powstaniem zmarłych z grobu. Rozdział ten pokazuje, że jest to tylko jedna z wielu możliwych interpretacji.

Na chwilę obecną znanych jest ponad dwadzieścia wczesnośredniowiecznych grobów z ziem polskich, w których kamienie ułożone zostały bezpośrednio na zwłokach. Groby te datowane są zasadniczo od późnego X wieku aż po wiek XIII, ale praktyka kładzenia kamieni w ten sposób nie ustała i była kontynuowana także w późniejszych okresach dziejowych.

W okresie wczesnego średniowiecza zwyczaj kładzenia kamieni na zmarłych był szczególnie popularny na obszarze Pomorza Zachodniego, ale zarejestrowano go także na stanowiskach z terenów Wielkopolski, Kujaw, Śląska i Mazowsza. W każdym z tych regionów przybierał on inne formy, co może też sugerować, że przypisywano mu różne treści.

Zwyczaj umieszczania kamieni w jamach grobowych wykazuje interesujące cechy na cmentarzysku w Cedyni, gdzie zaobserwowano dwa jego warianty: 1. kamienie umieszczone są bezpośrednio na ciele zmarłej osoby (groby 63, 68, 186, 639); 2. kamienie zastępują brakujące lub przemieszczone części ciała (groby 60, 146, 196, 215, 530, 552, 888). Z paroma wyjątkami (np. groby 68, 215), płeć wszystkich osób z wymienionych wyżej grobów określono jako męską.

W Wielkopolsce groby z kamieniami złożonymi bezpośrednio na zmarłych odkryte były na cmentarzyskach wczesnośredniowiecznych w Dziekanowicach, Koninku oraz Poznaniu-Śródce. Na ziemi chełmińskiej praktykę tę zaobserwowano na cmentarzysku w Kałdusie.

Zwyczaj kładzenia (lub rzucania) kamieni na zmarłych przybierał interesujące formy na terenie Śląska. Tutaj, na kilku cmentarzyskach, kamienie złożone bezpośrednio na zmarłych były bardzo okazałych rozmiarów – szczególną uwagę zwracają groby z Legnicy-Zamku (grób 22), Starego Zamku (grób 24) oraz Niemczy (104).

Kamienie w kontekstach funeralnych licznie występują też na obszarze Mazowsza, ale w tym przypadku zwykle stanowią one część zewnętrznej struktury grobów. Najbardziej wymownymi przykładami grobów mazowieckich z kamieniami położonymi bezpośrednio na zmarłych są groby 32 oraz 47 z Radomia. Warto zauważyć, że grób 47 jest pierwszym grobem atypowym, który w polskiej literaturze przedmiotu uznany został za należący do „wampira"[25]. Możliwe jest, że kamienie spoczywały też bezpośrednio na osobie pochowanej w grobie 9–9a w Żukowie, choć w tym przypadku – z uwagi na stan zachowania i niekompletną dokumentację – trudno wnioskować o tym z całą pewnością.

Kamienie w grobach dziecięcych

Oprócz wspomnianego wcześniej grobu z Poznania-Śródki, kamienie spoczywające bezpośrednio na szczątkach dzieci znalezione zostały także na cmentarzysku wczesnośredniowiecznym w Byczynie. Co ciekawe, w tym przypadku ułożone zostały one na szyjach dzieci. Znaczenie tej praktyki jest niejasne i może być interpretowane na szereg sposobów – być może pełniło to rolę czysto estetyczną oraz zapobiegało opadnięciu żuchwy bądź pomagało wyeksponować ciało w trakcie pogrzebu. W świetle materiałów etnograficznych, dopuszczalne jest także przypuszczenie, że taki zabieg był wyrazem obawy przed pośmiertną aktywnością zmarłych i miał na celu zapobieganie przed gryzieniem.

Przestrzenne rozmieszczenie w obrębie cmentarzysk

Groby z kamieniami, spoczywającymi bezpośrednio na zmarłych, znane są zarówno z cmentarzysk przykościelnych jak i pozakościelnych. Zazwyczaj groby tego typu nie są przestrzennie odizolowane od pozostałych, choć zdarzają się przypadki gdy ulokowane są one na granicy cmentarza (np. grób 24 z cmentarzyska w Starym Zamku).

Przedmioty towarzyszące zmarłym

Większość grobów omawianych w tym rozdziale pozbawiona jest wyposażenia, ale znane są również takie, gdzie zmarłym towarzyszą drobne przedmioty lub biżuteria. Osoba pochowana w grobie 60 w Cedyni miała pierścień wykonany z brązu i kabłączek skroniowy, natomiast w grobie 552 znajdował się pas z brązową sprzączką i piętnastoma okuciami. W grobie 11/92 z Dziekanowic odkryto żelazny nóż, rzekomo wbity w ziemię w pozycji pionowej. W grobie 27/92 z tego samego stanowiska znaleziona została niewielka kulka kamienna i fragment żelaznego drutu. Liczne przedmioty znajdowały się także w grobie 1 z Poznania-Śródki – m.in. żelazny gwóźdź, fragment srebrnej blachy, nóż żelazny oraz wiele kawałków ceramiki i kości zwierzęce. W grobie 15 z Koninka złożony był żelazny nóż w okuwanej brązową blachą pochewce. Szereg przedmiotów odkryto także w grobie 9–9a w Żukowie, a wśród nich było między innymi krzesiwo, żelazny nóż, dwie ostrogi i kawałki ceramiki. Pojedynczy nóż żelazny towarzyszył osobie pochowanej w grobie 24 na cmentarzysku w Starym Zamku.

Groby z kamieniami a inne atypowe praktyki pogrzebowe

W grobach, w których kamienie spoczywają bezpośrednio na zmarłych, rzadko rejestruje się współwystępowanie innych praktyk atypowych. W kilku grobach z Cedyni, oprócz przykrycia kamieniami różnych partii szkieletu, brakowało czaszek. W przypadku grobu 47 z Radomia zmarły nie tylko przykryty był kamieniami, ale złożony w pozycji na boku, z klatką piersiową skierowaną ku ziemi. Ponadto wiele wskazuje na to, że jego kończyny były związane.

Interpretowanie grobów z kamieniami

Podejmując próby interpretacji wczesnośredniowiecznych grobów z ziem polskich, zawierających kamienie złożone bezpośrednio na zmarłych, konieczne jest rozpatrzenie ich w kontekście dostępnych źródeł pisanych, a także materiałów porównawczych z innych kręgów kulturowych. W tej sekcji omawianego rozdziału, podobnie jak w rozdziałach poprzednich, skupiono się najpierw na analizie źródeł pisanych dotyczących ziem polskich, aby potem przejść od omówienia materiałów skandynawskich i anglosaskich.

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[25] Gąssowski 1950, s. 321–322.

Kamienowanie w źródłach pisanych

Kamienowanie pojawia się tylko w kilku średniowiecznych źródłach pisanych odnoszących się do terenów Polski. Podobnie jak w innych częściach Europy praktyka ta jawi się jako publiczna forma zbiorowego wymierzania sprawiedliwości.

O kamienowaniu wspomina Gall Anonim przy okazji opisywania rewolty pogańskiej, która miała miejsce w pierwszej połowie XI wieku. Słowianie, którzy powrócili do swoich przedchrześcijańskich wierzeń mieli, wedle Galla, obrzucić kamieniami chrześcijańskich duchownych. Gall wspomina także o kamienowaniu emisariusza Sieciecha. W obu przypadkach mamy do czynienia ze zbiorowym aktem przemocy wymierzonym w tych, z których działaniem i poglądami lokalna społeczność się nie zgadzała.

Motyw kamienowania pojawia się także m.in. w kronice Helmolda i również dotyczy chrześcijańskich duchownych, którzy potraktowani zostali w ten sposób w trakcie obodrzyckiego powstania w 1066 r.

Kamienowanie w Polsce późnośredniowiecznej

Chociaż źródła pisane dotyczące ziem polskich sugerują, że praktyka kamienowania zaprzestana została u schyłku XIII, to na podstawie materiałów archeologicznych można stwierdzić, że na niektórych cmentarzyskach nadal praktykowano układanie (ew. rzucanie) kamieni na zwłokach. Działania te miały jednak nieco innych charakter niż we wczesnym średniowieczu.

Szereg przykładów układania kamieni oraz cegłówek na zmarłych znanych jest z Łekna oraz Tarnowa Pałuckiego. Dotychczas interpretowane były one w sposób dość tradycyjny i jednoznacznie uznawane za zabiegi o charakterze antywampirycznym. Nie wykluczone jednak, że tego typu praktyki nie wiązały się z obawą przed żywymi trupami i stanowiły sposób na estetyczne wyeksponowanie bądź ułożenie zwłok w trakcie pogrzebu, a także służyły zapobiegnięciu opadania żuchwy. W dalszych dyskusjach zwrócono również uwagę na znaleziska z Fordonu w Bydgoszczy, gdzie głowy zmarłych obstawione były dachówkami. Praktyka ta mogła mieć różne znaczenia i służyć zabezpieczeniu głowy zmarłego w trakcie zasypywania grobu, lub pomagać w ułożeniu jej w zamierzony sposób tak, aby zmarły „patrzył" w odpowiednim kierunku. W toku dalszej dyskusji wspomniano także o jednym z grobów z Miłkowa, gdzie sporej wielkości kamień spoczywał na czaszce mężczyzny ułożonego w pozycji na brzuchu. Biorąc pod uwagę, że stanowisko to było dawnym miejscem egzekucji, gdzie grzebano skazańców, nie wykluczone jest, że zabieg ten stanowił formę dodatkowego pohańbienia zmarłej osoby, lub nawet, że była to forma zabezpieczenia się przed jej powrotem w formie żywego trupa. Warto przypomnieć, że w okresie wczesnonowożytnym grzebanie zmarłych na brzuchu i przykrywanie ich kamieniami było też jednym ze sposobów traktowania samobójców. Ostatnim z omówionych przykładów jest grób dziecka z Gorzowa Wielkopolskiego (grób 64), na którego szkielecie znaleziono dwie dachówki. Jakkolwiek grób ten był interpretowany jako pochówek dziecka mogącego przeistoczyć się w żywego trupa, dopuszczalne są też inne wyjaśnienia.

Perspektywy porównawcze

Jak wspomniano wcześniej, praktyka kamieniowania znana i praktykowana była wśród Germanów, zaś w staronordyckich źródłach pisanych zachowały się liczne przekazy, które opisują jej przebieg i rozmaite motywacje. W tej części omawianego rozdziału poświecono więc uwagę zarówno źródłom pisanym jak i adekwatnym materiałom archeologicznym z terenów Skandynawii, Islandii oraz anglosaskiej Anglii.

Kamienowanie i groby z kamieniami w Skandynawii z epoki wikingów

Motyw kamienowania pojawia się w trzech staronordyckich sagach (*Laxdœla saga, Gísla saga Súrssonar i Eyrbyggja saga*), należących do kategorii tak zwanych sag rodowych. Szczególnie bogata w szczegóły jest *Laxdœla saga*, gdzie mowa jest o rodzinie czarowników przybyłych na Islandię z Hebrydów. Głową rodziny jest niejaki Kotkell i towarzyszy mu jego żona Gríma oraz dwaj synowie. Od samego początku Islandczycy podchodzą do nich z rezerwą, a po jakimś czasie Kotkell i jego rodzina oskarżeni są o kradzież i morderstwo, co zmusza ich do ucieczki. Wkrótce wszyscy zostają złapani i kolejno poddani egzekucji. Kotkell i jego żona zostają ukamienowani i, co ciekawe, przed tym aktem na ich głowy włożone są worki, prawdopodobnie z obawy przed ich „złym okiem". Saga podaje, że po kamienowaniu ciała czarowników zostały pochowane w płytkim grobie oraz dodatkowo przykryte kamieniami. Synowie Kotkella i Grímy także zostają zabici – jeden z nich jest utopiony (do jego szyi przywiązano kamień), a drugi ukamienowany podobnie jak jego rodzice.

W *Gísla saga Súrssonar* kamienowaniu również poddani zostają czarownicy. Tak jak w przypadku z *Laxdœla saga*, akt egzekucji odbywa się w odosobnionym miejscu w górach. Po zakryciu głów i obrzuceniu kamieniami, ciała zmarłych czarowników dodatkowo przykryte są kamieniami.

Eyrbyggja saga wspomina o ukamienowaniu kobiety parającej się magią. Co ciekawe, aktu tego dokonano na plaży, czyli miejscu równie liminalnym jak wspomniane wcześniej górskie lokacje.

Warto podkreślić, że powyższe przykłady kamienowania nie są jedynymi źródłami staronordyckimi, ukazującymi wykorzystanie kamieni w egzekucjach lub w kontekstach rytualnych. Inne z nich zostały wspomniane w omawianym rozdziale, gdzie podano do nich szczegółowe odniesienia bibliograficzne.

W poczynionych rozważaniach zwrócono też uwagę na fakt, że akt kamienowania nie zawsze jest jednoznaczny z aktem układania kamieni na zwłokach. W przypadku staronordyckich sag widzimy jednak, że często oba zabiegi następowały po sobie. Niestety na podstawie zachowanych materiałów archeologicznych w postaci grobów zawierających ludzkie szczątki przykryte kamieniami – zarówno ze Skandynawii jak i innych obszarów Europy – trudno jest wnioskować czy kamienowanie było przyczyną śmierci (brak śladów na kościach). Takiej ewentualności nie można jednak zupełnie wykluczyć.

Po omówieniu staronordyckich źródeł pisanych, dalsze sekcje niniejszego rozdziału skupiają się na analizie wybranych przykładów grobów z kamieniami znalezionych w Danii, Szwecji (wraz z Gotlandią), Islandii oraz Norwegii.

Praktyka układania (lub rzucania) kamieni na zmarłych zarejestrowana została na kilku cmentarzyskach wczesnośredniowiecznych na terenie duńskiej wyspy Zelandii. Najbardziej wymownym przykładem jest grób z Gerdrup, gdzie pochowano dwie osoby – mężczyznę i kobietę. Mężczyzna najprawdopodobniej poniósł śmierć przez powieszenie, o czym świadczą jego skręcone kręgi szyjne, natomiast ciało kobiety przygniecione zostało dwoma dużymi kamieniami (jeden na klatce piersiowej, drugi na prawej kończynie dolnej). Co ciekawe, obok zmarłej ułożony był także żelazny grot włóczni. Grób ten interpretowany jest jako należący do osoby (lub osób) parającej się magią, zaś sama włócznia jako atrybut o znaczeniu rytualnym lub nawet specyficzna forma różdżki.

Kolejnym przykładem z Zelandii jest grób A505 z cmentarzyska w Trekroner-Grydehøj. Pochowano tam kobietę w towarzystwie licznych przedmiotów i zwierząt. W trakcie złożonych ceremonii pogrzebowych jej zwłoki przykryto dużej wielkości kamieniami i dodatkowym płaszczem kamiennym. Sądząc po specyfice znalezionych w tym grobie zabytków, a także po sposobie potraktowania zmarłej, wiele przemawia za tym, że podobnie jak kobieta z Gerdrup, również ona zaangażowana była w praktykowanie magii.

Groby z kamieniami położonymi bezpośrednio na zmarłych znane są także z wczesnośredniowiecznego cmentarzyska w Bogøvej na wyspie Langeland w Danii. Najciekawszym z nich jest grób P, w którym pochowano dorosłego mężczyznę w pozycji na brzuchu, a jego ciało dodatkowo przykryto kilkoma kamieniami. Co znamienne, u jego stóp znajdował się wbity w ziemię nóż.

Na terenie Szwecji zwyczaj układania kamieni na zmarłych nie wydaje się być specjalnie popularny – przykłady znane są na przykład z wczesnośredniowiecznego cmentarzyska w Virentofta, a także z późnośredniowiecznego cmentarza w Sigtunie.

Kamienie znajdowane są także we wczesnośredniowiecznych grobach na Gotlandii. Należy jednak zauważyć, ze czasem ich obecność w grobie może być incydentalna, gdyż kamienie stanowią typowy element geologii tej wyspy i na tamtejszych cmentarzyskach jest ich bardzo wiele. Jedne z najciekawszych przykładów grobów z kamieniami ułożonymi bezpośrednio na zmarłych odkryte zostały na cmentarzysku we Fröjel. Co ciekawe, groby te – pomimo kamieni „przygniatających" zwłoki – niejednokrotnie zawierały bardzo bogate wyposażenie. Na przykład kobieta pochowana w grobie 9/89 miała m.in. brosze, grzebień i żelazny nóż. Wyposażenie tego typu grobów w cenne przedmioty może sugerować, że pochowane w nich osoby nie były postrzegane w sposób negatywny i że z praktyką układania (lub rzucania) kamieni na ich ciałach nie wiązały się żadne apotropeiczne treści. Podobnie jak w innych omawianych wcześniej przypadkach, także tutaj do każdego z grobów należy podchodzić indywidualnie i pozostawać otwartym na różne warianty interpretacyjne.

Groby z kamieniami znane są też z kilku cmentarzysk wczesnośredniowiecznych na Islandii, gdzie również postrzegać je można na rozmaite sposoby. Czasem faktycznie dopuszczalna jest interpretacja kamieni jako środków mających na celu zapobiegnięcie opuszczenia grobu przez potencjalnego żywego trupa, lecz w innych przypadkach kamienie mogły po prostu służyć zabezpieczeniu ciała przed zwierzętami lub rabunkiem.

Zabiegi związane z układaniem kamieni na ciałach zmarłych są rzadko spotykane w Norwegii. W podjętej w tym rozdziale dyskusji zwrócono jednak uwagę na statek grobowy z Osebergu, który został przycumowany do dużego głazu. Znaczenie tego aktu jest niejasne – mógł on wyrażać bardzo różne treści, np. chęć zatrzymania zmarłych w grobie z obawy przed ich szkodliwą pośmiertną aktywnością albo wyrażać nadzieję, że zmarli nadal będą pomagali żywym nie oddalając się do innego świata.

Kamienie i kamienowanie w anglosaskiej Anglii

Wyniki badań archeologicznych wskazują, że praktyka układania kamieni na zwłokach była stosunkowo rzadko podejmowana na cmentarzyskach wczesnośredniowiecznych w anglosaskiej Anglii. Ze studiów Andrew Reynoldsa wynika, że kamienie układane były na różnych częściach ciała – kończynach górnych i dolnych, w rejonie miednicy, a nawet na głowie[26]. Warto zauważyć, że czasem zamiast zwykłych kamieni na ciałach zmarłych kładzione były także kamienie żarnowe. Niektóre przypadki tego typu grobów interpretowane są jako należące do wspominanych wcześniej *cunning women*, czyli kobiet parających się magią. Pogląd ten zyskuje dodatkowe uzasadnienie w świetle bogatego lub nietypowego wyposażenia, które znajdowane jest w tego rodzaju grobach. W takich kontekstach kamienie ułożone (lub rzucone) na ciałach rzeczywiście mogły pełnić funkcję apotropeiczną i zabezpieczać przed pośmiertną aktywnością zmarłych. W tym świetle interpretuje je też Andrew Reynolds.

O kamienowaniu jako o karze śmierci traktuje anglosaskie prawo Æthelstana, gdzie mowa jest o tym, że stosowano je wobec niewolników, którzy dopuścili się aktu kradzieży lub wobec tych, którzy uciekli swym panom.

Na zakończenie omawianego rozdziału wspomniano również o odkryciach pochodzących z ważnego wczesnośredniowiecznego cmentarzyska z Raunds Furnells w Northamptonshire. W licznych znalezionych tam grobach kamienie ułożone były wokół głów zmarłych. Biorąc pod uwagę powszechność tego zwyczaju na tym stanowisku, trudno sądzić by praktyka ta służyła ochronie przed żywymi trupami. Można przypuszczać, że raczej miała ona na celu ochronienie głów zmarłych (na przykład w trakcie zasypywania jamy, albo przed niepożądanym działaniem zwierząt), bądź też pozwalała ułożyć je w określony sposób i upewnić się, że zmarli będą „patrzeć" w określoną stronę.

Konkluzje

W wielu poprzednich studiach groby z kamieniami spoczywającymi bezpośrednio na zmarłych postrzegane były jako należące do „wampirów" lub innego rodzaju żywych trupów. W świetle rozmaitych źródeł szczegółowo omówionych w tym rozdziale okazuje się, że praktyka ta mogła mieć o wiele bogatszy repertuar znaczeń.

Ujmując w sposób syntetyczny wczesnośredniowieczne znaleziska grobów z ziem polskich z kamieniami spoczywającymi bezpośrednio na zmarłych, można zauważyć szereg powtarzających się tendencji:

- Kamienie układane były zarówno na ciałach mężczyzn jak i kobiet.
- Zazwyczaj kamienie układane były na klatce piersiowej lub kończynach. Jedynie w Cedyni kamienie używane były jako substytuty brakujących głów.
- W odróżnieniu od odkryć ze Skandynawii lub anglosaskiej Anglii, na ziemiach polskich praktyka układania na kamieni nie współwystępowała z grzebaniem zmarłych na brzuchu (ale zob. Radom grób 47).
- Apotropeicznego znaczenia kamieni (mającego prawdopodobnie zapobiec powstaniu zmarłych z grobu) można dopatrywać się zaledwie w trzech przypadkach. Są to groby 104 z Niemczy, grób 24 ze Starego Zamku oraz grób 47 z Radomia.
- Przyczyna układania kamieni na szyi mogła być dość prozaiczna i związana z chęcią estetycznego wyeksponowania ciała w trakcie pogrzebu, zabezpieczając w ten sposób przed opadnięciem żuchwy. W niektórych przypadkach, być może, wiązało się to jednak z obawą, że osoby, które zmarły z otwartymi ustami mogą przeistoczyć się w żywe trupy. Układanie kamieni wokół głowy mogło być natomiast umotywowane chęcią skierowania jej w określoną stronę (na przykład na wschód, zgodnie z wierzeniami o zmartwychwstaniu Chrystusa).

W zakończeniu tego rozdziału wspomniano też o wyjątkowych zabiegach pogrzebowych zarejestrowanych na cmentarzysku wczesnośredniowiecznym w Dębczynie, częściowo związanych z umieszczaniem dużych kamieni w grobach. Oprócz kamieni zarejestrowano także ślady popogrzebowej ingerencji w przestrzeń grobu oraz ślady różnych manipulacji ludzkich szczątków. Atypowe groby z tego stanowiska zostały przeanalizowane bardziej szczegółowo w Rozdziale 7.

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[26] Reynolds 2009.

Rozdział 7: Otwieranie grobów w Polsce wczesnośredniowiecznej

Idea otwierania grobów w celu pozyskania cennych przedmiotów lub interakcji ze zmarłymi znana jest już od czasów prehistorycznych, a zabiegi te praktykowane były przez różne społeczności na całym świecie. Jakkolwiek w czasach współczesnych otwieranie grobów często stanowi wykroczenie i jest swoistym tabu, to w przeszłości tego rodzaju akty niekoniecznie miały negatywne konotacje i nieraz były usankcjonowane przez specyficzne zwyczaje i wierzenia.

W ciągu ostatniej dekady problematyka otwierania grobów w pradziejach i średniowieczu cieszy się szczególnym zainteresowaniem badaczy. Znalazło to swój oddźwięk w różnych publikacjach (monografiach, pracach zbiorowych, artykułach), i podczas międzynarodowych konferencji. W polskiej literaturze naukowej nierzadko znaleźć można wzmianki na temat grobów, które zostały w jakiś sposób naruszone lub uszkodzone. Przypadki, gdy w grobach brakowało jakichś części szkieletu, czasem określano mianem „grobów cząstkowych". Okazjonalnie badacze zwracali też uwagę na praktykę otwierania grobu po jakimś czasie w celu dodania do niego kolejnej zmarłej osoby. Należy jednak zauważyć, że do 2015 roku, kiedy ukazał się artykuł Leszka Gardeły, Kamila Kajkowskiego i Pawła Szczepanika[27], znaleziska tego typu nie były przedmiotem szerszych opracowań.

Celem tego rozdziału jest podsumowanie dotychczasowej wiedzy na temat praktyk otwierania grobów w Polsce wczesnośredniowiecznej i rozpatrzenie ich na szerszym tle porównawczym, między innymi z wykorzystaniem źródeł skandynawskich i anglosaskich.

Ślady intencjonalnego otwierania grobów znajdowane są na cmentarzyskach wczesnośredniowiecznych praktycznie we wszystkich częściach Polski, choć na chwilę obecną trudno jest stwierdzić, czy w jakichś regionach zabiegi te praktykowane były ze wzmożoną intensywnością. Ponieważ zjawisko naruszania i otwierania grobów jest niezwykle szerokie i jego całościowe ujęcie wymagałoby osobnej monografii, w niniejszym rozdziale pokazano je jedynie w zarysie, starając się wyróżnić najbardziej charakterystyczne cechy i warianty.

Przestrzenne rozmieszczenie w obrębie cmentarzysk

Na podstawie dokonanego przeglądu źródeł udało się wstępnie ustalić, że groby noszące ślady wtórnego otwierania nie były ulokowane w specjalnie wydzielonych miejscach cmentarzysk ani też nie znajdowały się na ich obrzeżach. Jest to cecha szczególna, która wyróżnia je wśród innych rodzajów grobów uznanych w niniejszej pracy jako atypowe.

Warianty wtórnie otwartych grobów w Polsce wczesnośredniowiecznej

Zasadniczo można wyróżnić trzy podstawowe warianty i motywacje wtórnego otwierania grobów:

- Otwieranie grobów w celu dołożenia kolejnego osobnika.
- Otwieranie grobów w celu usunięcia określonych części ciała/kości.
- Otwieranie grobów w celu zranienia, unieruchomienia lub całkowitego unicestwienia zmarłych.

Dodatkowym wariantem, który można wiązać z zagadnieniem wtórnej ingerencji we wcześniejsze groby, jest wykorzystywanie pradziejowych cmentarzysk jako miejsc do dokonywania pochówków wczesnośredniowiecznych. Zabiegi te nie stanowiły jednak przedmiotu dyskusji w niniejszym rozdziale.

Na podstawie przeglądu źródeł można pokusić się o stwierdzenie, że chęć dodania kolejnego osobnika do wcześniej istniejącego grobu była najczęstszą przyczyną wtórnego otwierania grobów w Polsce wczesnośredniowiecznej. Na cmentarzysku w Dziekanowicach zarejestrowano szereg sposobów w jakie to czyniono, dlatego w niniejszym rozdziale poświęcono mu szczególną uwagę. Jeden z wariantów polegał na otwarciu grobu w taki sposób, aby nie naruszyć szczątków pierwotnie pochowanej osoby. Następnie jamę poszerzano i dodawano zwłoki kolejnej osoby, układając je w pozycji na boku. Inny wariant polegał na otwarciu grobu i przesunięciu zeszkieletowionych szczątków ku dolnemu końcowi jamy, tworząc tym samym wolne miejsce na dodawane zwłoki. Co ciekawe, praktyka przesuwania lub przenoszenia szczątków kostnych w dolną część jamy grobowej znana jest nie tylko z Dziekanowic i odnotowano ją na szeregu innych cmentarzysk wczesnośredniowiecznych – m.in. w Komorowie, Wolinie Młynówce, Brzegu, Złotej Pińczowskiej i w Ostrowitem. Warto też zwrócić uwagę, że we wszystkich wymienionych wyżej przypadkach osobą dodawaną do grobu *zawsze* była kobieta. W dalszej części rozdziału każdy z wymienionych wyżej grobów omówiony został bardziej szczegółowo ze zwróceniem dodatkowej uwagi na ich wyposażenie i treści symboliczne. Niewykluczone, że groby te należą do osób blisko ze sobą spokrewnionych lub do takich, które łączyły więzy małżeńskie. Wiele nowych danych na temat tego typu grobów dostarczyć mogłyby badania aDNA i izotopów, ale na razie nie podjęto tego rodzaju analiz.

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[27] Gardeła, Kajkowski, Szczepanik 2015.

Na cmentarzyskach wczesnośredniowiecznych z ziem polskich – w odróżnieniu np. od cmentarzysk merowińskich, anglosaskich czy skandynawskich – tylko sporadycznie zarejestrowane zostały przykłady otwierania grobów w celu wydobycia z nich określonych przedmiotów lub kości zmarłych. Z tego typu zabiegami mamy być może do czynienia w przypadku kilku grobów z Cedyni, choć sposób ich dokumentacji nie pozwala na stwierdzenie, czy na pewno dokonano tam popogrzebowych ingerencji – można o tym przypuszczać jedynie na podstawie specyficznego ułożenia szczątków i/lub braku określonych części szkieletu. Z najbardziej przekonywującymi przykładami otwierania grobów w celu wydobycia z nich kości lub nawet unicestwienia zmarłych mamy do czynienia na cmentarzysku w Dębczynie. W kilku grobach zarejestrowano wkopy oraz różne zabiegi o – jak można przypuszczać – dość drastycznym charakterze. W grobie 1, po jego otwarciu, dokonano odjęcia czaszki i przemieszczenia jej w inne miejsce w obrębie tego samego grobu. Po otwarciu grobu 10, znajdujące się w nim szczątki przygnieciono kamieniem, a część kości wydobyto i poddano spaleniu. W przypadku grobu 29 usunięto kończyny dolne. Charakter tych zabiegów sugeruje, że rzeczywiście mogły być one podyktowane chęcią zabezpieczenia się przed potencjalnymi żywymi trupami.

Otwieranie grobów w polskich przekazach etnograficznych

Chociaż nie istnieją żadne źródła pisane, które tłumaczyłyby dokładne przyczyny otwierania grobów na wczesnośredniowiecznych cmentarzyskach z ziem polskich, szeregu wskazówek mogą potencjalnie dostarczyć analizy znacznie późniejszych przekazów etnograficznych. Jak zaznaczono jednak wcześniej, do źródeł etnograficznych należy podchodzić ze szczególną ostrożnością i pamiętać o ich znacznie młodszej chronologii.

W pracach tak znamienitych etnografów jak Adam Fischer, Henryk Biegeleisen czy Kazimierz Moszyński zawarto różne wzmianki na temat praktyki otwierania grobów. Co znamienne, w praktycznie wszystkich przypadkach były one związane z chęcią pozbycia się żywego trupa, który zagrażał lokalnej społeczności. Przekazy te często mają podobny schemat – grób podejrzanej osoby jest otwierany, ciało obracane twarzą do ziemi i czasem dodatkowo poddawane dekapitacji. Jakkolwiek zabiegi te wydają się podobne do niektórych wczesnośredniowiecznych praktyk pogrzebowych, to należy zwrócić uwagę, że w żadnym grobie osoby pochowanej na brzuchu, a także w zdecydowanej większości tych gdzie zmarli pozbawieni są głów (wyjątkiem jest jeden z grobów z Dębczyna), nie zarejestrowano śladów wtórnego otwierania. Fakt ten wymaga szczególnego podkreślenia i jest kolejnym przykładem na to, że przekazów nowożytnych nie powinno się bezkrytycznie używać do interpretacji zjawisk z czasów znacznie wcześniejszych.

Perspektywy porównawcze

Podobnie jak w rozdziałach poprzednich, także i tutaj starano się omówić atypowe zabiegi funeralne w perspektywie porównawczej, sięgając przede wszystkim do źródeł archeologicznych i pisanych z terenów skandynawskich i anglosaskiej Anglii.

Otwieranie grobów w świecie wikingów

Praktyka otwierania grobów znana jest z różnych skandynawskich stanowisk z epoki wikingów, a motywacje, które za nią stały, były bardzo zróżnicowane. Najczęściej otwierane były groby bogato wyposażone i zawierające komory lub łodzie, bądź statki. W odróżnieniu od ziem polskich, celem popogrzebowych ingerencji nierzadko było pozyskanie cennych przedmiotów towarzyszących zmarłym, choć zdarzały się też przypadki, kiedy podstawowym powodem mogła być chęć pozyskania kości lub nawet uszkodzenia, bądź pohańbienia ludzkich szczątków. Takie motywacje mogły kierować osobami odpowiedzialnymi za otwarcie grobu w Osebergu – niewykluczone, że dokonano tego na zlecenie króla Haralda Sinozębego, który w ten sposób chciał pokazać swoją siłę i władzę nad regionem Vestfold w Norwegii[28].

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[28] Bill, Daly 2012.

Oprócz licznych przykładów otwartych grobów, które zarejestrowane zostały w trakcie badań archeologicznych na terenie Skandynawii i Islandii, praktyki tego typu znane są także ze źródeł pisanych, przede wszystkim ze staronordyckich sag. Anne Hofmann[29], która poświęciła tym przekazom osobny artykuł, zwróciła uwagę, że wydzielić można kilka powodów otwierania grobów. Wśród nich była chęć pozyskania określonych przedmiotów, unicestwienie żywego trupa, a nawet znalezienie tymczasowego schronienia w komorach grobowych.

W swojej dyskusji Hofmann zwróciła też uwagę, że to, co dzisiaj nazywalibyśmy „rabunkiem", dawniej mogło być w pełni usankcjonowaną częścią praktyk pogrzebowych. Co więcej, wydobywania określonych przedmiotów z grobów mogły podejmować się te same osoby, które uczestniczyły w akcie ich złożenia podczas pogrzebu. Po jakimś czasie przedmioty te mogły zyskiwać szczególne właściwości i jako takie być niezbędne w różnych ważnych praktykach społecznych, co sankcjonowało ich wydobycie. Podobnym tropem podąża też Alison Klevnäs[30], która zwraca uwagę, że przedmioty wyciągane z grobów mogły być „nasycone esencją ich właściciela" (ang. *imbued with the essence of the owner*) i pełnić dodatkowo rolę mnemoniczną, służąc jako swoiste nośniki pamięci, które wykorzystać można było np. do legitymizacji nowej władzy bądź w innych złożonych praktykach społecznych.

W dalszej części tego rozdziału omówiono kilka przekazów ze staroislandzkich sag, które ukazują otwieranie grobów. Szczególnie istotna jest opowieść zanotowana w *Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar*, gdzie precyzyjnie opisany jest akt dostawania się do wnętrza grobu, a także zawartość komory grobowej. Należy podkreślić, że szczegóły podane w sadze dość wiernie korespondują z materiałami archeologicznymi znanymi z różnych części wikińskiego świata. Omawiając staronordyckie sagi zauważono też, że najczęściej praktyki otwierania grobów podejmowali się mężczyźni, choć w *Hervarar saga ok Heidreks* wspomniany jest przypadek, kiedy czyni to kobieta – co jednak znamienne, przybiera ona męskie imię. Większość sag podkreśla, że otwieranie grobów było zadaniem bardzo czasochłonnym (niektóre przekazy mówią o pięciu lub sześciu dniach potrzebnych by dostać się do wnętrza grobu), a przy tym dość niebezpiecznym i osnutym magiczną aurą.

Otwieranie grobów w anglosaskiej Anglii

W ostatnich latach motyw otwierania grobów w anglosaskiej Anglii analizowany był z różnych perspektyw, szczególnie w cyklu publikacji Alison Klevnäs i w jej cennej monografii zatytułowanej *Whodunnit? Grave Robbery in Anglo-Saxon England and the Merovingian Kingdoms*[31]. Na podstawie analiz szerokiej gamy źródeł Klevnäs umiejętnie pokazała, że zabiegi te służyły różnym celom i że należy z wielką ostrożnością określać akty popogrzebowej ingerencji w przestrzeń grobową mianem „rabunku". W najnowszych badaniach, inspirowanych teoriami zaczerpniętymi z socjologii i antropologii kulturowej, coraz częściej zwraca się uwagę na kwestie związane z ekonomią daru, biografiami przedmiotów czy samą koncepcją własności. Klevnäs podkreśla przy tym, że w momencie otwierania anglosaskich grobów, nie wyciągano z nich wszystkich złożonych przedmiotów, a tylko wybrane z nich – najczęściej były to brosze lub miecze. Co więcej, w działaniach tych nie zawsze istotne było czy wydobywany przedmiot jest dobrze zachowany lub cenny pod względem *stricte* materialnym – bardziej istotny był jego mnemoniczny charakter (np. związane z nim wspomnienia) czy właściwości symboliczne. Zwraca się też uwagę, że przedmioty wydobywane z anglosaskich grobów mogły odgrywać rolę w rozmaitych obrzędach związanych z dziedziczeniem ról czy funkcji społecznych – jako takie mogły one stanowić ważne rekwizyty pomagające na przykład w legitymizowaniu władzy określonej jednostki. Na podstawie analiz materiałów archeologicznych i ich chronologii udało się ustalić, że zwykle otwierane były groby w obrębie jednego pokolenia – a zatem należące do takich osób, o których pamięć nadal pozostawała świeża. Tak jak w przypadku Skandynawii, preferowano otwieranie grobów okazałych i bogato wyposażonych.

Konkluzje

Zasadnicze konkluzje, jakie płyną z porównawczego studium otwierania grobów we wczesnośredniowiecznej Polsce, sprowadzają się do stwierdzenia, że wyjątkowo sporadycznie praktyki te były umotywowane chęcią zatrzymania niebezpiecznych zmarłych w grobie. Wcześniejsze poglądy, ukazujące wtórnie otwarte groby z ziem polskich w świetle praktyk „antywampirycznych", należy więc odrzucić. Jak widzieliśmy, w większości przypadków podstawowym celem było dołożenie kolejnej osoby do istniejącego wcześniej grobu. Równie rzadkie jest też naruszanie, uszkadzanie lub wydobywanie szczątków zmarłych, bądź przedmiotów z nimi pochowanych. Wszystko to stoi w dość dużym kontraście wobec danych na temat otwierania grobów w świecie skandynawskim czy anglosaskim. Można zatem przypuszczać, że celem, który przyświecał otwieraniu grobów w Polsce wczesnośredniowiecznej było zazwyczaj pochowanie ze sobą osób w jakiś sposób ze sobą związanych – być może małżonków bądź członków jednej rodziny czy rodu. Jak podkreślono, niektóre z zależności pomiędzy zmarłymi pochowanymi w tego typu grobach można spróbować odkryć dzięki specjalistycznym badaniom aDNA czy izotopów – wszystko to nadal jeszcze przed nami.

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[29] Hofmann 2015.

[30] Klevnäs 2016.

[31] Klevnäs 2007; 2013; 2015a; 2015b.

Rozdział 8: Konkluzje

Uważne prześledzenie dziejów badań i dyskusji nad pochówkami atypowymi z ziem polskich, a także ich ponowna analiza w świetle źródeł pisanych oraz materiałów porównawczych z innych kręgów kulturowych, doprowadziły do wniosku, że wiele dawnych poglądów na temat tych praktyk funeralnych było błędnych albo wymaga gruntownego przewartościowania. Chociaż nie ulega wątpliwości, że wczesnośredniowieczne społeczności słowiańskie zamieszkujące ziemie polskie były wysoce przesądne, niniejsze studium pokazało, że identyfikowanie każdego przejawu nienormatywnych zabiegów pogrzebowych z praktykami antywampirycznymi jest sporym nadużyciem. Przyglądając się tym zjawiskom w sposób całościowy, udało się pokazać mnogość znaczeń, jakie wiązały się z pochówkami na brzuchu, zabiegami kładzenia lub rzucania kamieni na zwłoki, dekapitacją czy wtórnym otwieraniem grobów.

W ostatnim rozdziale omawianej pracy starano się pokazać szerszy, społeczny i ideologiczny kontekst pochówków atypowych na ziemiach polskich. Przede wszystkim zwrócono uwagę, że zaczynają się one pojawiać w okresie, kiedy – przynajmniej oficjalnie – elity państwa Piastów dokonały konwersji religijnej, przechodząc z wiary pogańskiej na wiarę chrześcijańską. Proces religijnych transformacji nie był łatwy i w różnym stopniu oddziaływał na społeczności zamieszkujące w tym czasie ziemie polskie. Musiało minąć wiele lat, aby lud zapomniał o dawnych, przedchrześcijańskich wierzeniach i praktykach, a przez wiele dziesięcioleci w różnych częściach piastowskiej domeny nadal ścierały się stare i nowe światopoglądy. Chociaż niektórzy wcześniejsi badacze skłonni byli widzieć pochówki atypowe w kontekście tych religijnych transformacji – na przykład jako swoisty społeczny odzew na zakaz palenia zwłok i wyraz obawy przed tym, że niepoddani kremacji zmarli mogą chcieć powrócić do świata żywych – wydaje się, że przyczyn nienormatywnych zabiegów funeralnych należy szukać gdzie indziej, a przynajmniej, że nie są one tak jednoznaczne, jak jeszcze do niedawna przypuszczano.

Pochówki atypowe zaczynają jawić się w całkowicie nowym świetle kiedy spojrzy się na nie w perspektywie porównawczej – tak jak uczyniono w niniejszej pracy – a także gdy skonfrontuje się je krytycznie z dostępnymi, średniowiecznymi źródłami pisanymi. W anglosaskiej Anglii, atypowe zabiegi pogrzebowe analogiczne do tych rejestrowanych na ziemiach polskich były praktykowane zarówno przed jak i po przyjęciu chrześcijaństwa. Warto jednak zwrócić uwagę, że po religijnej konwersji ich częstotliwość wzrosła, co nie wiązało się nagle z wybuchem „plagi żywych trupów", a raczej ze skomplikowanymi procesami związanymi z konsolidacją władzy monarszej oraz coraz silniejszym i skuteczniejszym aparatem prawa. Zdaniem Andrew Reynoldsa[32] elity rządzące zaczęły wówczas stosować różne instrumenty władzy, które nie tylko znajdowały swój wyraz w zdolności prowadzenia wojen, akumulowania bogactwa czy konstruowania imponujących rezydencji. Jednym ze sposobów budowania reputacji, a jednocześnie nowego społecznego ładu przez anglosaskich władców, była umiejętność prowadzenia skutecznych negocjacji z oponentami i sojusznikami oraz zaprowadzenia porządku w obrębie podległej im domeny. Siła rosnących elit była zatem dodatkowo podkreślona poprzez wprowadzenie praw, wznoszenie miejsc straceń i wypracowanie sposobów na wykluczanie tych, którzy nie przystają do panujących norm.

Można sądzić, że podobne mechanizmy zaczęły działać także w państwie Piastów po religijnej konwersji oraz wejściu w orbitę międzynarodowych wpływów, a także po wzmocnieniu władzy dynastycznej. Interesujący nas w niniejszej monografii okres od schyłku X do XIII wieku to czas wielkich zmian, dotykających praktycznie wszystkich sfer życia. Był to też czas niespotykanego dotąd rozwoju, który zyskiwał namacalne formy w postaci wciąż rozbudowywanej sieci grodów, rosnącej liczby osad rzemieślniczo-produkcyjnych oraz architektury kamiennej, a przy tym dynamicznego przepływu ludzi, idei oraz dóbr z różnych zakątków ówczesnego świata. Częścią tych zmian stała się także konieczność rozwoju systemu prawa i metod wymierzania sprawiedliwości. Chociaż osobne, publiczne miejsca straceń nie istniały na ziemiach polskich przed końcem XIV wieku, warto zwrócić uwagę, że największe nasilenie tak zwanych pochówków atypowych (groby z ciałami pochowanymi na brzuchu, z kamieniami na zmarłych czy ze śladami dekapitacji) rejestrowane jest już od XI wieku w regionach znajdujących się w samym sercu piastowskiej domeny, w Wielkopolsce (np. Giecz, Dziekanowice, Poznań Śródka) oraz na ziemi chełmińskiej (np. Kałdus), a także w okolicach ważnych miejsc, gdzie intensywnie toczył się międzykulturowy handel i wymiana (Wolin). Można odczytywać to jako sygnał, że już za rządów Bolesława Chrobrego i jego bezpośrednich następców starano się wypracowywać publiczne sposoby karania osób, które dopuściły się rozmaitych występków – takie praktyki jak grzebanie na brzuchu (być może żywcem) oraz dekapitacja były doskonałą, choć niewątpliwie drastyczną z dzisiejszego punktu widzenia, formą manifestowania władzy, pełniącą dodatkowo funkcję dydaktyczną i prewencyjną.

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[32] Reynolds 2009.

W niniejszej pracy nie zakwestionowano możliwości, aby wybrane groby atypowe należały do osób, których pośmiertnej aktywności się obawiano i które mogły być postrzegane jako żywe trupy. Wskazano jednak, że nie jest to jedyny możliwy sposób interpretacji nienormatywnych praktyk pogrzebowych. W podjętych tu dyskusjach zaakcentowano konieczność rozpatrywania każdego przypadku w sposób możliwie jak najbardziej zindywidualizowany i kontekstualny – tylko takie podejście, zdaniem autora, może pozwolić na lepsze zrozumienie subtelności minionej epoki oraz doprowadzić do pełniejszego poznania rozmaitych aspektów życia i śmierci ludzi, którzy ją tworzyli. Podchodząc do zmarłych pochowanych w grobach atypowych w ten sposób oraz próbując dostrzec oraz opowiedzieć ich historie, możemy znacznie skuteczniej przyczynić się do ich nieśmiertelności niż poprzez określanie ich wszystkich mianem „wampirów".

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